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Honor of a Princess

A ROMANCE OF

THE TIME OF "GOOD QUEEN BESS"

BY

F. KIMBALL ^{Sc}SCRIBNER
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CHAPTER I.

HOW A GENTLEMAN OF ENGLAND BECAME A ROVER.

I love the clash of steel, and from my earliest recollections listened with beating heart to the wild tales of adventure, with which the company wont to gather 'round my father's table beguiled the long after dinner hours. 'Twas small wonder, being of the House of Merguille, a race bred to knightly deeds, and example was not lacking to fan into flame the desire burning within me to become a participant in the brave deeds of those adventurous navigators who were hewing a way for the advance of civilization in the new world.

One of those who encouraged my wild dreams, was Sir Henry Martant, my father's younger brother, who had sailed with the famous Francis Drake, returning in a blaze of glory to be knighted by the Queen. That he had, forsooth, lost an ear and two of his fingers in an encounter with the savages, instead of turning me from my purpose, rather whetted it the more, and the old spirit being yet strong within him, he encouraged me in my mad projects, although

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my father had spoken with much sternness concerning the matter. It was not so much his influence, however, which finally decided me to leave a comfortable home for that I knew not of, as an incident which well nigh landed me in the Tower, if not upon the gallows itself.

It so chanced, that I, together with a dozen other young gallants of the neighborhood, more hot headed than wise, had fallen in love with the youngest daughter of old Sir Thomas Caldwalder, a retired soldier, and a boon companion of my father; forsooth I might well have let matters run as they were, for it was the common talk that the old gentlemen had intended us for each other. Filled, however, with a desire to show my prowess, and perchance being overheated with wine, I did end their bargaining by as foolish a piece of business as the times had reckoning of, and many things since hath shown it so to me.

Edith Caldwalder lived in the manor-house some three miles beyond my father's border line, and four times each week I was wont to ride thither for the pleasure of her company. She was a blue-eyed little maid who, knowing her charms, played fast and loose with my temper until I would ride sullenly home resolving to return no more to the witchery of her

smiles, but the next day would see me back, only to begin anew. I have seen many women during my wanderings; and never but one who could compare with her—but their natures were as wide apart as the Hebrides. Edith Caldwell drew me as the loadstone the needle, and my temper was by no means improved when I discovered with mad jealousy that I had a rival. To be sure there were a score close at hand, but the one of whom I speak differed from these.

One night an hour after sundown, chancing to drop into the village inn, I was greeted by half a score of young gentlemen, as harebrained as myself, who shook their glasses in my face shouting in chorus that the siren had at last found a man to her liking. When I sought to learn the meaning of their discourse, one, less drunken than his fellows, bawled out there had arrived that day at Heathcote Manor, a man upon whom the lady cast her sweetest smiles; and further, I learned the fellow was fresh from London and the sweetness of his presence (much high scented perfume being then in vogue at Court), turned faint the very birds that frequented the manor grounds.

“Were you half a man,” quoth my informant, “you would have him by the ear,

that he learn a lesson whereby he no more come into these parts to charm away the hearts of our young women."

Then, as the others laughed loudly at this sally of senseless wit, the blood rushed to my temples, and the red consciousness there, made them but roar the more.

"And here," cried another, "is a crown, that Hal Martant sits in idleness and leaves this bird of fine feathers to his wooing."

"Taken!" cried I, throwing my hat violently upon the table, "and two crowns more that I send him whence he came with but little honor to brag upon."

Then as they shook the glasses above their heads crying bravo, and clapping me on the back, I snatched my hat and bowing low to the company leaped astride my horse and galloped off like one crazed.

Sir Thomas's estate lay some two miles from the door of the inn, therefore I had ample time to nurse my wrath as I galloped along the broad highway, the sharp click of my horse's hoofs keeping time to the clanking of the steel bridle rein. Following the common custom of the period, I wore my sword, a long rapier of tempered steel, and carried beside, in the holster, a pair of French pistols, the gift of a channel trader. These, with plumed hat, doe-skin gauntlets and military dress, gave

to me the marks of the experienced campaigner, not of the sort which thrived in the Queen's household, but of a roving blade, ready to draw at a hasty jest or the shake of a dice box. My father who, since his return from the French wars, had settled down into as peaceable a landholder as could be found in all England, often commented on my braggart style of playing the gallant, but my head being filled with the matter, I carried the thing yet further, and bent habits to inclination. Withal there were few to dispute me, for being gifted with a quick eye, and having learned lessons of a past master there was scarcely a baker's dozen in all the south who could best me when it came to the matter of a sword thrust. But to return to my errand.

As I have said, the manor grounds lay some two miles from the tavern, and the moon being exceedingly bright, the time went quickly ere I pulled up beside the hedge which separated the park from the common highway. It was at a point some five hundred rods from the manor itself, a great structure of grey tone, that I left my horse by the roadside, and, following a path I well knew, entered the park.

I had gone scarce three hundred yards, when I caught sight of a white gown among the shrubbery, which, with the sweet odor

that assailed my nostrils, portended a speedy ending to my errand. Nor was the edge of my temper lessened when, on drawing nearer, I perceived the two together, her hand in his, and his blonde locks almost mingling with hers. As I watched them, biting my lips and fingering my sword hilt, I warranted the knave was filling her head with such flattery as the gallants of the Court were well practiced in. Be that as it may, at the sight, I straightway forgot I stood upon her father's land, and striding forward, seized the unsuspecting youth by the collar, and with no gentle force threw him upon his face into the nearest clump of brambles. As for her, thinking no doubt that a bold and blood-thirsty highwayman had invaded the quiet of the park, she began to scream and covered her face with her hands.

“Fear not madame,” I cried, “’tis only Hal Martant, who has but a word with this fine fellow whose feathers I perceive are so rudely ruffled.”

At that she drew herself up and would have answered, but the other was before her. Picking himself out of the bushes, his clothes awry, and a dozen bloody scratches showing on his fair skin, he broke into such a tirade of abuse that I resolved in my heart the affair should end in a more

serious manner than a simple ear pulling. As he stood before me, flecking the dirt from his linen, I perceived that he was a man near my own build, with carefully curled mustache and a watery blue eye, such as lie in wait to flatter with their tongue, but to whom honor and the fair fame of women are but idle jests, to be bantered over a wine cup. His person was resplendent with gold lace and ribbons, which, added to his general appearance, ruffled as he was by reason of my sudden greeting, forced a smile to my lips despite the weight of the occasion.

Having regained his breath he opened on me anew, beating the air and leaping about in fantastic fashion, all of which the more confirmed my opinion of the fellow's shallowness.

"Thou country clout," he sputtered, "thou boorish knave, were it not for the fair presence of this lady my sword would teach thee that every fool who breathes good English air had best remain tied to his mother's apron strings, else he fall upon his nose."

"As to fools," replied I, "there be those who ape the courtier and, as to falling on one's nose perchance experience hath taught thee something."

"Then, as he only dug his heels into the

gravel, screwing his face, and thrusting out his tongue, instead of answering like a man, I drew my sword and struck him with the flat of it upon the shin.

"I perceive you are well armed," said I, "or, is thy sword but a bodkin fit only for the pricking of a finger?"

His face turned white as chalk, and snatching out his weapon he flew at me, thrusting and striking like a schoolboy. As I felt his blade against my own, I knew on the instant that I had him, and the more to further my amusement, I let him come on, content for the time that he spend himself. That he did with great dispatch and had his rage been less, he must have seen that there could be but one ending to the matter. As for Mistress Edith, so filled with fright was she that she stood quite still, watching the moonlight on our blades.

I know not how the matter might have ended, for so weak was he at sword play, that to kill him would have been simple murder, had he not brought the thing upon himself. Weary of so much sparring, I thrust forward, intending to wound him in the arm, but a root catching him about the ankles, tripped him, and down he came upon my point with so great a force, that I felt my hilt rattle against his ribs. Dropping his sword he fell forward jerking the

hilt from my hand and lay upon his face with two feet of steel between his shoulders.

Thinking to save the man I got him in my arms, supporting him against my shoulder, and drawing out the blade as gently as I might. He groaned feebly, clapped his hands to the wound, opening his eyes, but there was no light in them and, with a gush of blood staining his lips, his head fell forward and I knew he was dead.

A sob aroused me; I had thought that Edith Caldwell would have fainted, or have turned from me, but I had mistaken her. With a cry she caught me by the hand lifting her eyes to mine.

"Hal! Hal!" she sobbed, her voice so shaken that I had to bend nearer to catch the words, "why have you done this thing? Know you not that he was the Queen's messenger?"

Her words sobered me; to thrust my sword through a man's body was bad enough, but that man, Elizabeth's messenger! I already felt my head upon the block.

"Oh, my love! my love!" she cried, "they will kill you, too, and you are more to me than all the world."

Forgetting everything, the man at my feet, the anger of the Queen, the shadow of the gallows itself, I caught her in my

arms, crying out it mattered not to me, that for her love I was content to slay all the Queen's messengers in England, even though Elizabeth herself stood by.

She put her hand on my lips checking the wild words.

"There is yet time," she cried, "you have a horse, and there are ships that sail for France; to-morrow all England will know."

I stopped her with a kiss.

"Sweetheart," said I, "to leave England is to leave thee, and that will I never do, no, not for all the queens in God's universe!"

At that she fell to weeping again, begging me to save myself, for her sake if not for my own, and for the space of five minutes we stood thus, her arms about my neck, and her heart close against mine.

All things must end and in time her words moved me. Knowing full well that I could summon no excuse for the killing of the messenger, and that being a Catholic the quality of the Queen's anger would be all the greater, I came to consider in my mind that I was like to embark upon an adventure of which I had had no reckoning. She read my purpose in my eyes and a brave smile shone through her tears.

"Thou wilt go, my love!" she cried, "yet

it will be but for a little while; if tears move the Queen—”

Said I, “ ’twill if God spares me, be but for a little while, and the Queen being as thou, a woman, she may come to look kindly on this thing, and as for thee, sweet-heart, wilt love me always even though thy father come ’twixt thee and me?”

“Neither my father nor all the world, for art thou not my love, and for love of me thou hast done this thing?”

“Then,” said I, “I go from England and from thee, yet will I return again though the whole world be opposed.”

She clung to me for a little, with a great love shining in her eyes, then I felt her kiss upon my lips, and she was gone. Back through the park I went slowly, as one dazed by a heavy blow; behind lay the Tower, and the block; before — God wot, not I.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THREE SAT AT TABLE IN THE BULL'S TAVERN.

There was, in my father's house, one Thomas Brandt, an old soldier, who having served through five campaigns had ended by saving my sire's life during the last French war. Through love of the man's rough nature, as well as on the score of gratitude, he had from that time shared a corner at our fireside, where he stretched his legs and twirled his thumbs with but little fear that old age would find him destitute.

When I say that the man was old I put it on the score of experience rather than of years, for scarcely yet past forty, there were none more rugged in all the south country, nor was there anyone, knight or baron, who could equal him at thrusts and passes. It was from Red Thomas, for so we had come to style him, his face being like an autumn sunset, that I had learned my prowess with the sword, and how to ride, and to wield the battle axe. Born of a line of sturdy yeomen, he was wont to grumble over the turn times had taken, holding

that a stout broadsword and a grey goose shaft were better fitted for the sport of war than the more modern style of smoke and cannon balls. And in that respect he bolstered up my father's hobby, for being a soldier of the old school, whose ancestors had fought at Crecy and Poitiers, Sir Charles's heart turned to the brave days of pennons, clanking mail, and goodly deeds of knightly chivalry.

It was nothing strange, therefore, that in casting about to find a helpmate in this dire extremity my thoughts turned to the hardy veteran to whose bringing up I owed my talents, and perchance also the spirit of the soldier which burned within me.

So, when covered with dust, my dress bloody and heart as a lump of lead, I threw myself from the saddle at the door of my father's stable, I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving upon seeing Red Tom seated astride a bench, humming in a mumbling tone a favorite war ditty, which had oft rolled from ten thousand English throats across the Flemish marshes. Oft had I heard the song, and well I knew it by heart, but never before had it sounded so sweetly, as when ringing out in the moonlight of that summer night, it told me there was one strong arm in all England that would come between me and the threaten-

ing axe. As to the singer, catching sight of me and noting not the disorder of my dress, he raised his voice yet higher, beating time to the melody with the stave that was in his hand:

“Who sings of France and a Frenchman’s steel,
Or the cringing heart of Spain;
When the yeomen bold of good Queen Bess
Sack their lands with the sword and flame?
Who boasts of a glance from a fair dame’s eye,
Or the frown of the matron staid;
For where is the man who’d tarry long
From the smile of an English maid?”

Then ending suddenly he snapped his fingers, tossed the stave high in the air and bawled out to me a rough welcome.

“Cease thy capers,” cried I, “there is more afoot to-night than idle screeching. If a week hence my head be yet upon my shoulders I—”

Up he jumped, peering at me in the moonlight, then perceiving my condition, stood still with his mouth halfway open.

“Am I the devil that thy wits leave thee so suddenly?” said I, “I tell thee, Red Tom, that this night by a simple sword thrust I am like to leave thee, and that rudely.”

“Anon?” said he.

“At the whirr of an axe,” said I, “and in the hands of the Queen’s executioner.”

He put his hand to his beard and

chuckled softly. "S' blood;" said he, "I warrant there hath been a man killing."

"The Queen's messenger; Lady Caldwell—"

"God!" he muttered, "'tis ever the fault of a flaunting petticoat and this is like to be something more than a country quarrel!"

"Yes, cried I, "France or the Tower. On the morrow Elizabeth will know —"

"That a Catholic hath slain one of her gallants!" he burst out, "a pretty piece of business to tickle the ears of thy father. S' blood! thou hadst best move quickly."

"And in truth," said I, "'twas for that I sought thee."

He pondered for an instant running his hand through his hair " 'Tis forty miles to London," said he, "but there be a moon; is thy horse fresh?"

"London!" I cried, "what, art thou mad? 'Tis to London they would take me!"

"I know a tavern hard by a dark alley," said he, "where there be no Queen's officers. Once there, we—"

"We?" I cried, "would'st lose thy head also?"

"Nay," he muttered, "neither shalt thou lose thine, and yet I shall ride with thee; for this good twelvemonth hath my hand been idle, and if thou left me here—"

"No more!" I answered, a lump rising in my throat, "is't not bad enough already, that thou too shouldst lose thy comfort? If I go, I go alone."

"Then," said he, "I shall follow thee, and I warrant the trail be a bloody one, for to reach thee they must pass me, and—"

"Come," said I, "there is something to be done, but no more blood, there be enough spilled this night already."

Had it been daylight, or the country folk abroad, there had been some stir at our appearance. There was need for haste, and but little thought of horseflesh when once we reached the main highway. I had changed my dress for a rough suit of trooper's uniform and, riding at my side, astride his big roan mare, Red Tom, with his cap of steel upon his head, wearing the breastplate scarred with many blows gotten in desperate fights, and his long cross-handled sword girt upon his hip. I warrant me that two rougher-seeming knaves ne'er galloped horse along the Queen's highway, and with the shadow of the axe athwart our path, 'twould have fallen ill with any who that night would block our way to the gates of London town.

Through its hours we rode, now pulling up our panting horses to ease their wind, now galloping furiously along the hard

dusty road past hedge and farm house, silent and shadowy in the moonlight. But twice we drew rein 'twixt my father's house and our destination; once to water the steeds at a brook that crossed the way, and once again to exchange words with a solitary horseman whom we overtook jogging along the highway some fifteen miles from the gates of London. As, turning a sudden bend in the road, we came upon him, I saw Red Tom's mouth set hard and the hand that hung idly at his side reach for the sword hilt; but the horseman hearing behind him the clatter of hoofs, drew up across the roadway and bawled out to us a rough salutation.

"Ho, friends!" cried he, "wherefore so quickly when the day is but beginning? Forsooth, it be some five long hours since I have bespoken man or beast, and 'twould give me exceeding pleasure to journey in thy goodly company."

"Nay," replied Red Tom curtly, "we be upon the Queen's business, and there be much need of haste; goest thou to London?"

"That do I," quoth the stranger, "and from thence to France, yet being a veteran of some twoscore campaigns, both great and small, wouldst save my horseflesh; methinks thou hast ridden far this night?"

"To France sayst thou?" broke in Red Tom eagerly, "be there then a ship—"

"Ay! at sundown, be the wind fair in the offing; but harken ye, comrade, if I be not much mistaken methinks I have seen such a countenance as that thou bearest afore; hast thou then forgotten a trench before Calais whereunto didst come a certain huge French man-at-arms?"

I saw my companion start in his saddle, and pushing his horse against that of the speaker he peered critically into the face half hidden by the loose riding bonnet, then drew back suddenly and struck his hand with a resounding slap upon the other's shoulder, whereupon methought the stranger had tumbled down upon the highway.

"And one Captain Fritz von Francius," he cried, "who didst contend most boldly for the honor of the company; methought that voice—"

"Lieber Himmel!" cried the other clutching at his bridle rein, "wouldst slay me with that mighty fist of thine? ce n'est pas un bleu, that thou shouldst seek to sweep me from the saddle?"

Red Tom chuckled loudly. "Thou art the same," cried he, "thou didst ever best me with thy ready tongue; my French be as rusty as my sword and 'tis these many

days since we fought together in the trenches."

Having thus delivered himself he turned about to me, who had sat silent witness to their verbal passes.

"Thou hast heard, perchance, something concerning one Von Francius; rememberest thou the name?"

And well I did, for oft had Red Tom poured into my ears much concerning a certain German comrade-in-arms, a man well known to my father, and the hero of a score of hard fought skirmishes. Having therefore exchanged greetings we drew up on either flank of Captain Von Francius, who, during the remaining miles that separated us from London, did enter into much discourse concerning the old wars, plunging now into French, now into English, and anon into his native tongue, until Red Tom uttered a great oath declaring that none but a school teacher could follow him. But as to myself, being well versed in the more common languages of the period, I gained much diversion from the Captain's reminiscences.

Presently the houses along the highway became more frequent, and we passed from time to time footmen, and carts drawn by spavined horses, or yokes of oxen, which my companions told me were going to the

great market place in London, for the gates of the city were scarce four miles distant, and at that my heart grew exceedingly heavy, for it was to London that they would have taken me. Having at the end of half an hour passed into the city, Red Tom did take his old comrade a little aside, and presently I perceived the Captain looking hard at me, whereupon I summoned up what courage I might, for I was ashamed of my faint heartedness. When they had done whispering together Von Francius crossed over to me and held out his hand, saying cheerily: "Thou need'st now fear nothing, thy father was my comrade, thou art his son; donnerwetter! wouldst that I had had my finger deeper in this business."

Looking into his keen grey eyes, I felt my heart grow lighter, for with two such trusty comrades at my side, I warranted me my taking would be no light matter, and as yet none knew that I had fled to London.

It being yet so early in the morning there was but a scattering of townsmen in the streets, and they, each one intent upon his own affairs, did pay but little heed to us as, following in Red Tom's wake, we proceeded toward that section of the city where were situated the dwelling places of sailors and seafaring men whose business

warranted them but little time ashore. It was there that they who would be sent to find me would meet the most difficulty, for the population being made up of half a dozen nationalities, and every second man a rogue of one sort or other, there was little love abroad for the color of the Queen's uniform. I learned afterward that it was concerning this matter that Red Tom had spoken to the Captain, and Von Francius being a man whose duties as well as inclination had taken him much among seafaring men, knew of a dozen masters of channel vessels who for the matter of a handful of silver pieces, would agree to smuggle us aboard their craft, so secretly, that were half the Queen's army to carry on the search for me, they would return as empty handed as they came. Had I known at the time, what later came to my ears, that it was not until the evening of the day upon which I reached London, the officers were set upon my track (so firmly did Edith Caldwell hold her peace), and that when it became known whose hand slew the Queen's messenger, the Captain, Red Tom and Hal Martant would be tossing on the waters of the channel with the good ship's prow bearing toward the shores of France, I warrant me I had joined more heartily in my comrades' merriment.

We had followed Red Tom through the streets of London for the space of perhaps half an hour, when suddenly he pulled up the roan mare afore the entrance of a two-story wooden building standing a little back from the roadway. Over the door of the place swung backward and forward in the morning breeze, a dingy sign, bearing on its face the ill-painted visage of a red-eyed bull. At the clatter of our horses' hoofs upon the cobble stones, the door of this tavern was swung of a sudden open, and the owner of the house issued forth, his fat paunch covered by an apron of dazzling whiteness, and his eyes twinkling greedily at the thought of three such goodly customers. On catching sight of him Red Tom straightened himself up and bawled lustily: "Ho, Master Peter, and is't thou? methought that thou wert dead these many days and gone to thy fathers; hast thou room for three subjects of the Queen within thy tavern?"

The fat face of Master Peter became a mass of smiles. "Room and to spare," quoth he, "where else except at the Bull's Head tavern shouldst thou fill thy stomachs, most worthy gentlemen, for where else in all London can be found—"

"S'blood!" cried Red Tom, letting himself out of the saddle, "thou wert ever a

boaster after thine own fashion; get thee gone then, quickly, that my lord and master and this worthy gentleman be not kept too long in waiting."

"And forget not a goodly quantity of thy brownest ale," growled the Captain, "for by the twelve Apostles, I am that dry that a sermon at Canterbury hath no comparison."

Whereupon he of the white apron did bestir himself exceedingly, and with many bows and much nodding of the head preceded us within the house, when, having removed as well as we might the dust which lay thick upon us, we sat ourselves down to as likely a breakfast as I have ever reckoned upon. And 'twas upon this occasion I found that man's most stringent master is his stomach, for filled with fear as I was, and expecting each moment to hear the clatter of them who sought me without, yet did I apply myself so dilligently to that which was set before me, that Red Tom and the Captain exchanged glances of amusement, and ceased for a time their own eating that they might comment upon my appetite.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE THREE COMRADES SET FOOT IN FRANCE.

I have often wondered whether a man ever really forgets anything; if there be not, in the recesses of the mind, some chambers wherein are stored incidents and impressions that have come into his life, and which some subsequent event may recall; as the sound of a voice, or the sight of a face arising from the shadows of the past. Be that as it may, the meeting of Captain Von Francius and Red Tom on the Queen's highway, and the spark of remembrance rekindled in the breast of the former, concerning that which had happened in the wars, brought into my life an adventure which even my idle dreaming had scarce reckoned upon.

Having finished that which good Master Peter had set before us, and the table being cleared, the first act of our new comrade was to close and bolt the door, which having done he returned to us at the table.

"It hath ever been my custom," said he, "to guard against an enemy in the rear, and I warrant me there be them about,

who for so light a matter as the payment of a crown, would have the Queen's hirelings about thine ears, friend Martant; therefore that we be not disturbed, I render less likely an attack on the flank, which philosophy I studied much from the teachings of a soldier of mine own country, ere I first journeyed to the wars."

"Thou wert ever good at planning," broke in Red Tom, "whether it be afield or in the camp, therefore I pray of thee, give to us such of thy counsel as seemeth best befitting to thee."

"As to that," said the Captain, "I was about to speak, but first thou must give unto me the true inwardness of the matter whereby you run so quickly from the sight of a trooper's uniform?"

"S'blood," growled Red Tom, "'twas scarce a matter of so much import, seeing that the thrust was in open fight, and the chances being somewhat equal; yet methinks that Master Martant being a Catholic, and the Queen much wrought up at this time concerning certain weighty dissensions in the Church, and he that is slain chancing to be her messenger, there be much need of—"

Von Francius struck his fist upon the table. "By my hilt!" he cried, "thou

speakest with some smattering of wisdom, but where goest thou?"

"Methought of the Americas," I replied, "Elizabeth would scarce—"

"Gott!" cried he, "then thou art truly mad, and 'tis well that I met with thee; the Americas forsooth and why not Schleswig?"

"Schleswig?" said I.

"Mine own country," said he, "where I warrant the Queen of England will scarce look for thee; hast not heard then of Schleswig?"

"Methinks," I replied, "that some faint rumor thereof hath reached my ears, but whether it be—"

Upon that he broke into such a flood of round German oaths that Red Tom roared with laughter.

"S'blood! comrade," cried he, "the lad is neither like thee or me, and having seen but little of the world outside the corner of this island, 'tis not much wonder that thy small kingdom hath escaped his memory."

The Captain's face softened. "True!" said he, "yet thy answer touched me deeply; thou shalt then go with me to Schleswig, and I warrant thou wilt find much business. Thou art young, and hath a good sword, and the King hath need of some such

service as thou mayst render. Art thou agreed?"

On questioning him further I learned that the country of which he spoke lay to the North, close upon the border of the Danes, and that despite the smallness of the kingdom there was at the time of which I speak a merry game afoot, two being claimants to the throne, which pass of affairs involved a matter of much open sword play, and of more secret throat cutting. Finding that Red Tom was much of the Captain's mind, and being in sore straits, I agreed to accompany him to Schleswig, or to the moon, for that matter, provided only that it took me out of England. Therefore, the thing being settled, my companions left me in hiding at the inn, like any common criminal, for, explained Von Francius, there was to be seen a certain captain of a trading schooner, who for the matter of some ten pounds would doubtless agree to land us safely on the coast of France. Being wearied with my journey I presently fell asleep, to be awakened by a hand upon my shoulder: starting up I found that it was late in the afternoon, and Red Tom had come to tell me that all was ready.

Having therefore paid to Master Peter that which was due him, I followed my companion into the open air, and presently

found myself near the water's edge, where Captain Von Francius awaited us. With him was a certain Hargrave, as ill looking a knave as it had ever been my fortune to encounter, yet being the owner of a fast sailing schooner, and he having agreed for the payment of a dozen gold pieces to land us unscathed upon the coast of France, I was content to return his friendly greeting, for in adversity no man can be the chooser. Moreover, I was much pleased to learn that our horses were already on board the vessel. As Red Tom put it, 'twould be but a sorry joke to find oneself in a foreign country with naught but ones' legs to depend upon; and as I perceived how thoroughly laid had been the plans for our departure, I marveled greatly at the Captain's expediency.

Presently I found myself on board the schooner, drinking to the Master's health, in as mellow a bottle of old port as had ever made its way from out my father's cellar, and after that there was much bustling about, mingled with hoarse commands and a goodly scattering of oaths as the sailors bent their backs to the windlass. Being at length free from her anchorage, the schooner swung into the stream, and the breeze bellying out the sails, she crept down the river leaving the walls of Lon-

don in her wake. It was about this same hour that Edith Caldwalder stood before her father, who, surrounded by a dozen gentry of the neighborhood, demanded of her the name of him who had slain the Queen's messenger. Being hard put to it atwixt the command imposed upon her and the fear that I might yet be taken, she parried with them for a time longer, and even then I doubt me if they had wrung it from her, except that news came to their ears concerning the sudden leave taking of Hal Martant and Red Tom. As to my father, I learned afterward, that understanding my nature, and being secretly against the Queen because of her religion, he stormed much outwardly, but in reality did that which seemed the most fitting to his understanding, to delay the search that was set afoot. Had I gone to him in my extremity, I warrant I should have ridden away with more gold pieces in my pocket. It hath since that day been my firm conviction, were they, who are near and dear to each other, more prone to gather a fuller understanding of that which concerneth their welfare, passing by petty words and slight bickerings which come not from the heart, fewer sorrows would follow ill-favored quarrels over which the devil doth take much pleasure;

but all this I comprehended not till long after.

The breeze that had warranted Master Hargrave in weighing anchor, continued more briskly as we passed down the river, and ere the schooner sighted the Point of Wardens, lying some three miles on our right, the staunch little craft was heeling over until in my nervousness, methought that of a sudden she would founder outright, and there would come a speedy ending to my errand. While I stood upon the deck, combatting with a strange sickness which wellnigh overcame me, the head of Red Tom appeared above the hatchway, whereupon I learned that my presence was wanted in the Master's cabin.

Making way thither as best I could, I found the Captain together with the owner of the vessel discussing a flask of spirits that stood upon the table between them, and at the latter's elbow lay a great chart of the coast of France.

"Ho!" cried Von Francius on catching sight of my expression, "das Meer ist sehr ungestum und thou art but a poor sailor I perceive, yet I remember well when first I set foot aboard a ship together with some twoscore others, there arose that within me that drove away all thought but of my stomach, and had I died that day I

warrant me I should have cared but little. Yet I came well out of it as thou seest, and, as I doubt me not good Master Hargrave here will tell thee, hath done many another. Take thee then a manly pull at yon flask, for I would have thy opinion concerning a certain weighty matter."

Having done as he bid, a new hope sprung up in my heart, and seating myself by Red Tom's side I awaited his further speaking.

"There be two courses," said he; "that we bear straight down upon Calais, or by taking a more southerly course enter France by way of the city of Boulogne." Then, I replying nothing, he continued:

"I have in my mind that ere reaching mine own country there be many leagues of travel, and the journey being long, it were well to press on with all speed into Belgium, and thence by way of the Netherlands and Germany, to the border of Scheswig; what thinkst thou?"

To which I replied that I cared little whether by way of Calais or Boulogne, so that we left the schooner as quickly as possible, whereupon Master Hargrave laughed loudly, declaring with an oath that I was in much haste to leave his company.

"And," broke in Red Tom, "methinks that at Calais there be a certain damsel

who would scarce have forgotten me. If we but tarry in the town for the space of one day, I would fain hold certain parley with the same."

"Donnerwetter!" cried the Captain, "she will need wait long for thee; must we then tarry on our way for every French ballerina?"

It was therefore decided that the schooner's course should be laid straight across the channel to Calais, so that we reach the land as quickly as possible, and having disembarked and attended to our horses, we would push on into Belgium, stopping at Ghent, in which city there dwelt a kinsman of the Captain. Having settled the matter, the Master returned to his duties. As my companions had slept not at all for the space of some forty hours, they straightway stretched themselves at full length on the cushions with which the cabin was provided, and presently there arose such a chorus of snores and groans, that I made haste to climb on deck again, trusting rather to the fury of the weather which lay in the hands of God, than to noises and mutterings which would, forsooth, have put to blush the chorus of the damned. Here did such a sickness lay hold upon me with wrenching of the stomach and a weakening dizziness, that,

had the vessel and all on board gone to the bottom of the channel, I would have cared not a whit; again I perceived that 'tis his stomach that ruleth a man both in his hours of hope and of despair.

It was scarce daybreak, when, having fallen into a restless doze with my back against the schooner's yawl, I was awakened by the sound of much confusion, and looking over the side of the vessel, perceived that we had drawn near to the land. Catching sight of certain dark shadows rising out of the mist, which I took to be the walls of the city, I strained my eyes to get a better view thereof, for 'twas behind those self same buttresses that my father had led his last command. 'Twas in the trenches at their base that Captain Von Francius had slain in single combat the giant French man-at-arms, and where Red Tom had received the sword cut which had lopped off two of the fingers of his hand.

As it grew lighter, and looking across the water I discerned more plainly the heaps of grey masonry surmounted by a white banner with its golden lilies, there came a great pain into my heart, for it had ever been a dream that my first landing in France should be with sword in hand, and under the flag of England. Pres-

ently the Captain and Red Tom appeared on deck, clothed as though for battle, and accompanying them below I made ready for disembarking. Already the arrival of the schooner had been perceived from the shore, so that upon returning to the deck we found a native of the city alongside, who after much bickering with the Captain, agreed to put us, together with the horses, ashore for the payment of half a crown.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW AN ADVENTURE BEFELL IN CRANENBURG FOREST.

Concerning my journey from the coast of France to the border of Schleswig, there is little to be spoken of. Remaining for the space of one night at Ghent, we were in the saddle again ere sunrise, and, pushing across the country toward the east, we came upon Brussels while it was yet early in the morning, and scarce half the inhabitants out of doors. Having shaken off the fear of the Queen's officers, it was with much delectation that I listened to the rough discourse of my companions, there being scarcely a town or a city through which we passed wherein one or the other, and especially Captain Von Francius, had not, during the wars, met with certain adventures. Having ridden with as much speed as the strength of our horses would allow, on the fourth day we crossed over a corner of the Netherlands, and came upon a place called Cranenburg, which lay just beyond the border into Germany; and here we met with an adven-

ture, which methinks, well nigh put an ending to my journeyings.

Just beyond the town, and extending for a matter of some five leagues or more, lay one of those thickly-wooded forests of which there were to be found a great number throughout Germany at that period, the highway running through the centre thereof, and being shut in as by a wall of trees on either hand. Having tarried in Cranenburg that our horses might be fed and we might partake of the wine famous in that district, we proceeded on our way, arriving some three miles beyond the town at the border of the forest, whereupon Captain Von Francius did pull up his horse.

"Methinks," said he, "that this same place is somewhat known to me; for, if I mistake not, there be them afoot within the recesses thereof who are wont to give to strangers but a rude welcome. Hast thou thy pistols handy, Master Martant?"

"And wherefore dost thou fear?" asked I.

"'Tis nothing," said he, "but I did hear it spoken at yon inn that there be one Karl Werner, a refugee from justice, who doth make the forest his hiding-place."

"Then," cried Red Tom, "let us ride quickly on; methought from thy discourse that there be a company of archers con-

cealed amongst the trees; if this croc-mitaine doth molest us, there will be, I warrant, one less rogue in Germany."

The Captain shrugged his shoulders. "Thou wert ever spoiling for a game of sword play," said he, "be it in razzia or a la danse."

Then we proceeded onward till of a sudden we came upon an open space, in the centre of which burned a fire, and hard by five horses tied by their bridles to as many branches. About the blaze crouched four ill-visaged ruffians, while at a little distance, and nearer to the horses, lay a man flat upon his back, his wrists and ankles bound by leather thongs.

So sudden did we come upon this scene that the Captain had ridden well nigh into the very fire itself ere he checked his speed, and as to the four who sat about it, such was their amazement, that for the space of a minute they did only stare with mouths agape. Not so with him who lay bound, for no sooner caught he sight of us than he set up such a bellowing that the roan mare took sudden fright and well nigh cast Red Tom upon the ground. But soon the ruffians regained their wits, and one starting up, did pluck an iron from the fire, making as though to thrust it in the eyes of him who lay bound; ere he could

carry out this, his purpose, Captain Von Francius pushed his horse between the two.

"Hold!" cried he, whipping out his sword, "wouldst thou thus play the Turk in the presence of Christian gentlemen? Zounds, but I have ever ready that argument whereby I wouldst hold stern discourse with such as thou!"

"And what is that to thee?" growled the larger of the four, "that thou shouldst play the judge in such matters as ill concerneth thee? Take good care, then, else thou wilt feel the iron also."

Of a sudden he drew from his belt a pistol and methought the Captain's day was surely come, for what chance hath a sword against an iron pellet? But I reckoned not on the Captain's perception of the matter.

Throwing himself quickly from his horse he escaped the bullet by the breadth of but a hair, whereupon the other drew his sword also, and the two went at it in right royal fashion. Nor were we idle in the matter, for straightway the three companions of him who engaged the Captain set upon us, two being armed with swords, the third bearing in his hand a huge battle-ax he had snatched from the ground beside the fire. Red Tom being nearest him that

held it, drew his great sword, and had there not been certain business of my own, I warrant me I had witnessed that which would have stirred the soldier's blood within me. But being set upon by two at the same instant, one on either side, I did draw one of my pistols and shot the nearest through the head, whereupon he fell, his fighting forever ended. Yet the report of the weapon having frightened my horse, and being over green at the business, I did find myself sprawling upon my back in the pathway, and the companion of him who was dead would have surely finished me, had not Red Tom, who had made quick business of his axman, ridden up from behind and, with one great sweep of his blade, well nigh severed my opponent's head from his body. Whereupon having slain two of the enemy, he would have entered more into the matter, and have served likewise him who contended with the Captain, but that the latter noting his purpose, did cry out to him to keep off, for as he told us afterward, the leader of the rogues was a most excellent swordsman, and there was much pleasure in opposing him. Therefore we stood still, and when I perceived the quickness of the Captain's thrusts and passes, together with the nimbleness of his guard, I marveled not concerning that

which I had heard of him. As to Red Tom, so sure was he as to the ending of the matter, that he set about cleaning his sword blade with a tuft of grass, humming to himself a ditty meanwhile, yet as I perceived watching the combatants from the corner of his eye.

Presently the superior swordsmanship of Von Francius began to tell; thrice he wounded the other in the body, till weak from loss of blood the outlaw's thrusts grew more feeble, and the clatter of the steel less furious. I warrant the Captain would have slain him speedily, except a thing happened that we wotted not of. As Von Francius delivered a half parried blow which cut a gash in the other's shoulder, there came to our ears a mighty beating of hoofs with the rattling of steel, and suddenly there rode down upon us a company of some twoscore horsemen, sword in hand, and each with a German oath upon his lips. Seeing us, they separated into two divisions, hemming us in as by a wall of steel, and on that instant I gave up all as lost.

As to the wounded outlaw, no sooner did he catch sight of the newcomers than, casting away his sword, he folded his arms across his breast, and with the air of one who has played a bold game and lost,

awaited doggedly that which fate had in store for him. Such was the mettle of those bold spirits who spared none themselves, and being overcome besought no mercy at the hands of their conquerors.

Truly methinks that we too had been slain, had not he who was bound cried out to them to hold. Whereupon his bonds being cut by one of the soldiers, he did step up to Captain Von Francius, then to Red Tom and to me, and did thank us heartily for having thus turned the iron from his eyes.

We learned that he was no other than the Lord High Constable of Munster, who, journeying with one attendant through the forest, had been set upon by Karl Werner and his band, and the servant being quickly slain, it had been agreed upon to burn out the master's eyes, that he might serve as a warning to other constables who might chance to pass that way. As to the company of horsemen, they were his own body guard, who, following some half hour after him, had heard our pistol shots and hastened forward with all speed possible. Such, then, being the outcome of the matter, there arose a discussion concerning what should be done with the outlaw who had fallen into their hands. Some were for putting out his eyes with the self-same weapon

which had been intended for their master, but in this, better judgment prevailed, for he of Munster, turning to Captain Von Francius, thus addressed him:

“Forsooth, methinks that there be but one voice in this matter and that be thine, seeing thou hadst this man’s life in thy hand; what sayest thou then shall be done with this outlaw?”

The Captain replied quickly: “’Tis but little I believe in inhuman practices such as are common amongst the Turks, and them that dwell in the East, for it appeareth to me that this being a land wherein reigneth a most Christian King, the use of hot irons and the rack and other implements of torture are in no wise profitable; therefore, having been given some voice in the matter, I would suggest that an end be made to this little business by hanging yon outlaw to a tree.”

“S’blood!” broke in Red Tom, “I did foretell thine answer, mon comrade, for be not a dead outlaw better than a blind one, even in Germany?”

Whereupon Sir Wilhelm, for the Lord High Constable was so called, did smile broadly, and gave orders unto the soldiers that the captive be dealt with according to the Captain’s judgment. When it had been done, and the man dead, the constable did

urge that we accompany him to Munster, where he might do us honor for having rescued him so handily. But having already lost much time we explained that we must needs ride on our journey with all haste, and so we left him.

Presently I perceived that there rested on the Captain's face a frown; upon inquiring the reason thereof he replied that it was but a poor adventure which left one such as he with so little blood upon his sword.

"That I have come these many miles," said he, "and only upon such a slight diversion to break the monotony of the journey: the matter endeth in but a neck stretching, yet thou being but a boy poorly understandeth such matters."

"Be that as it may," replied I, "yet there be much blood spilt already."

"Perdieu!" he muttered, "Wouldst that mes enfans d'enfer could hear thee."

"Of whom speakest thou," I asked.

"Of mine own company," growled he, "them as followed me in the late wars; I warrant we shall find some in Schleswig who will teach thee something."

For the remainder of that day he spoke no more, riding sullenly on his way with his bloodless sword dangling at his side. Yet was this not a token that Von Francius was more bloodthirsty than the times war-

ranted, for upon entering into a discussion with Red Tom concerning the matter, I gathered that 'twas the sudden interruption of his sword play that lay at the bottom of the mischief, and moreover, on the day following the Captain no more thought of the matter, nor did I recall the grievance to his memory.

There yet being some seventy leagues remaining of our journey, we tarried but little and that always by night, sometimes in the fields and woods along the highway, but more often at one or other of those small inns, great numbers of which there were in Germany.

Looking back I have oft-times wondered wherefore we were not stopped more frequently, for although we met with many of the gentry of the country, and, upon one occasion with a goodly body of the King's troops, we were allowed to proceed with scant questioning.

Finally, having ridden across three countries, to wit, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, to say nothing of the little time we journeyed on the soil of France, late one evening we drew nigh unto a town, Rendsborg by name, beyond which lay the River Eider, the boundary line 'twixt Holstein and the country we sought. Having passed the night in the town, early next

morning we were called to saddle, and presently reaching the summit of a hill which lay in the way, I saw the tops of the trees which marked the border forest of Schleswig.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THERE CAME TWO KINGS IN SCHLESWIG.

As I have said, the country of Schleswig lies to the north, close unto the border of the Danes, its chief city being Schleswig, also. And for a better understanding concerning the kingdom, I have gathered in my memory such things of its history as came to me at the time, from persons whose positions entitled them to speak knowingly regarding such matters.

The city, the King's capital, was founded some eight centuries prior to that period in which I journeyed thither, and resting as it did upon a rocky promontory extending into the sea, being moreover nearly surrounded by the latter, it afforded not only a place of much value for trading purposes, but in time of war a defence of no mean strength. Concerning the country in general, with its forests and plains, its castles and fortresses, together with the bravery of its inhabitants, I warrant me 'twould be found a hard undertaking were any to venture thereunto upon a hostile errand. Yet, lying 'twixt Denmark and

the more southerly countries, it was ever a source of envy to the former.

There was, when I crossed its border, a king upon the throne of Schleswig, and 'tis the things concerning him and his house, which touch me nearly. Having gathered together such threads of the history of the kingdom as pertaineth to the royal house, methinks 'twere of much import to weave them into compact form, in order that it become known why so much internal dissension sprung up within the borders of the land; for 'tis into these very matters that I did enter so largely.

Now there had some fifty years before the time of which I write, prevailed an armed truce between the royal house and a certain small dukedom which lay a little to the west of the capital city, and close upon the border of Holstein. It was contended by certain persons, whose fortunes lay only in their swords, that 'twas the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, and not his Majesty the King, who was best entitled to wear the crown. That the future peace of the country might be further assured, there did arise certain statesmen who putting their heads together hatched a scheme whereby the King's cousin, he being heir to the throne, be joined in marriage to the daughter of the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, where-

upon the succession would fall to the offspring thereof, and the ambition of both houses be satisfied, each after its own liking.

Therefore the ceremony having taken place in the great cathedral at Schleswig, as was the manner of the royal marriages of the country, upon which occasion a special envoy of the Pope bestowed his blessing on not only the prince and princess, but also the common people at large, there was much rejoicing throughout the territory. The old King being at that time in his seventieth year and very feeble with a certain incurable malady, at the end of a year, or thereabouts, did die, and the daughter of the Duke of Friedrichsstadt became the Queen of Schleswig. In time an heir was born, and having thus fulfilled her duty to her country, she died after the manner of all good Catholics.

But now there arose a matter that all the wisdom in the world could not have reckoned upon. It chanced that in the fifth year of the new King's reign, the Prince being then four years old, there arrived within the borders of the kingdom, a certain soldier fresh from the wars in France, who did proclaim himself the bastard son of the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, and the rightful heir of the throne of Schleswig. The Duke

being at that time ill, his daughter dead, and wishing, perchance, to end his days in peace, did enter into an agreement with the newcomer, whereby the latter, having promised allegiance to the King, should, at his death, become his successor.

Yet methinks, and there be others high in authority of the same mind, 'twould have been more fitting if this selfsame bastard had been strung up speedily, or had, upon the authority of the King, been cast into prison, where I warrant he would have had ample time to curse his master, the evil one, who had led him into such unprofitable business. For it hath been well brought out in history, not alone in the annals of such small principalities as be found throughout Europe, but also in the government of France, England and Germany, 'twere better for the welfare of the country that such matters be decided by the sword, wherein lieth a more certain settlement, than in diplomancy. For there doth ever arise certain matters which had best be ended at the time, that the future peace of them most concerned be not rudely overturned; and so it proved in the case whereof I speak.

Having then come into possession of the dukedom, the bastard did straightway forget his allegiance to the King, his master, and

did cast about whereby he might lay hands upon the crown of Schleswig, claiming that he, being male issue of the Duke, there lay in him, rather than in a woman, that succession which was formerly claimed by the house of Friedrichsstadt.

The times being not ripe for the furtherance of his plans, he ceased outwardly his contention, seeming to all beholders a loyal subject to the King, yet secretly he did so instruct his son, who was to follow him, that there sprung up in the heart of the latter a desire to possess the crown, which remained present until he died, and was in turn given as an inheritance to his heir, who, at the period in which I first set foot in Schleswig, was the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, and in his fortieth year.

The King, Rupert the Third, being the grandson of the Prince who had allied himself with the House of Friedrichsstadt, and had but lately come to the throne, his father having reigned for the space of eight and twenty years, was in truth sorely beset by a great danger, for the Duke having stirred up much dissension throughout his own domain against the throne, which ill feeling had extended even unto the other sections of the kingdom, had secretly proclaimed himself king, and although open war had not broken out as yet, there being

much cunning in the Duke's methods, there was like to be great strife and discord presently.

The King only about my own age, and illy versed in such matters, had done nothing, so that the arch plotter did yet show his face in Schleswig, and carried treason into the very court itself. I am convinced that there is a fate which doth shape the order of all things, be they small or great, for otherwise how was it that I, a subject to the queen of England, which country hath little concern in so small a corner as Schleswig, should, through the simple killing of a messenger, become the agent who unthinkingly stood betwixt a throne and the treacherous hand whose fingers sought to clutch the sceptre?

But I surmised little concerning that which was to follow; the extremity of the young King, and of his sister the Princess Alice, the blackness of him of Friedrichstadt, and many other matters, as, riding by Red Tom's side, I beheld the waters of the river Eider, and beyond, the green of the forest that marked the country of which Captain Von Francius had sung so loudly.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE PRINCESS ALICE KEPT HER TRYST.

There is on the main street of Schleswig, which leadeth from the gate of the city to the great public square, a hostlery kept by one August Schwerin, a man of good family in that country, and blood relation to Captain Von Francius. 'Twas to this place therefore that the latter did conduct us on the evening of the day wherein we reached the royal city. And this selfsame tavern being hard by the palace of the King, was much frequented by officers and followers of the Court. It chanced that Captain Von Francius, no doubt wishing to make it appear unto his kinsman that he did travel in exceeding good company, represented unto Master Schwerin that I had come as a secret and special envoy from Her Majesty the Queen of England to Rupert Third, King of Schleswig, and he who kept the tavern being much concerned regarding the honor done him and exceedingly puffed up that he alone of all the people should know concerning my errand, did set aside for my use the best room the tavern afforded.

It so chanced that this same room overlooked with its windows the garden wherein the officers of the Court were wont to discuss their wine together; and here again am I convinced that Fate had much to do with the matter.

On the third evening following my entrance into Schleswig, Red Tom and the Captain having gone about some private business, I found myself seated alone beside the window overlooking the garden, a flask of wine at my elbow and thoughts playing sad havoc with my peace of mind. For as I gazed over the housetops toward the shade of the forest beyond the walls of the city, there came straightway into my heart a great longing for that other forest, wherein I had often walked with Edith Caldwell afore I slew the Queen's messenger, and ended such hopes as I had perchance cherished.

Strong man that I was, there did come to me that which set me to moping like a schoolboy, with chin upon my breast and hands thrust deep into my breeches pockets. There arose before me the one whom I had left so rudely, and who, forsooth, wept bitterly through fear in her gentle heart for my well being. Had I left her dead, well comprehending 'twas the will of God which separated us, I had been of more

cheerful countenance, but 'twas the uncertainty of the thing that unsettled me.

I am fully convinced that absence doth bring the greatest misery to mankind, for 'tis incertitude, the sickness of heart, when day follows day, month comes after month, yet no token reaches us, that maketh the proudest head to bow. The blow caused by the death of one we love falls quickly, and, in time, hope being dead, the spirit doth recover, if only for a little; the torch of hope being quite extinguished the darkness is at first great and drear, nevertheless by degrees the eye doth become accustomed to it, but if the torch burn ever so faintly, casting forth only a sickly flash that blazes for an instant and then is gone, the mind doth become fixed upon it, and that hope wherein all men seek to live, doth open the wound afresh, whereby there be no comfort anywhere. And 'twas this hope burning within me, that perchance I should some day see her face again, which bore so heavily upon me. But presently, when the fit was worst, there arose a diversion which put a speedy ending to my dreaming.

As I have said, the window of my room did overlook the garden of the inn, where were placed a goodly number of small tables for the accommodation of them who

came thither to partake of things whereof the landlord boasted, and being seated before it with the room in darkness, the garden somewhat lighted, I could well see them who sat at the tables, while I remained invisible. Therefore when two officers wearing the King's livery took their places almost beneath me, and ordered of the landlord a flask of wine, I did turn my thoughts to that which was more tangible than idle dreamings. Presently, being aside from others, and thinking there were none to hear them, the pair fell to discussing certain affairs pertaining to the royal household.

"Then thou knowest not that which reached my ears but an hour since?" quoth the smaller of the two, poising his glass halfway'twixt his eye and the light.

"Gott! Thou magpie!" growled the other, a burly fellow clad in the uniform of the King's cavalry, "have I then naught to do but listen to such idle gossip as the women of the Court make practice of?"

"Thou wert ever too sudden with thy temper, comrade," replied his companion draining the glass at one swallow, "yet methinks this be no idle gossip such as thou speaketh of. Knowest thou that ere this the Princess hath left the palace?"

"What sayst thou?" cried the cavalry-

man, a look of much alarm overspreading his countenance, "thou art mad, man, hast not the King ordered—"

"That after nightfall his sister be not abroad," broke in the other carelessly, "Zounds! comrade, yet thou knowst that the Princess hath a will of her own."

"Donnerwetter! That she hath," muttered the officer, "yet the times being troublous, and her sense equal to her obstinacy, methinks—"

"Ach! She be very proud!"

"But tell me, Herr Lieutenant," cried the other, "where heardst thou this thing?"

"Mine own cousin whom thou knowst be second lady-in-waiting to her Highness, did bring it to me; at eight o'clock the Princess would leave the palace, and it now being within the hour, I wot not that—"

"But in the name of God wherefore this mad prank?"

"Oh, 'tis but a small matter, concerning the welfare of her house," replied the Lieutenant rubbing his beardless chin reflectively; "late in the afternoon there did come a messenger to the Princess bearing a letter, wherein was stated that of which I have no reckoning, yet did she read it carefully, and returned answer that at the stroke of nine she would be present in per-

son beside the great oak which marketh the—”

“Then she be truly mad!” cried the other bringing his fist down upon the table till the glasses rattled, “’tis a trick, comrade, the Duke—”

The Lieutenant raised his hand warningly, “Hush,” he whispered, “else thou wilt be the poorer presently; be it the Duke or the Devil himself to whom the Princess hath given her royal promise. Yet do I fear, as thou, that a pretty trap be laid for her.”

I saw the hand of the cavalryman go to his sword hilt. “Then will I warn the King, cried he sharply, “and when the Princess doth come to the oak, I warrant me there be those behind her who will have somewhat to say in the matter.”

“And find thyself in the Tower on the morrow,” laughed his companion, “dost thou then so little know the Princess?”

“Zounds!” growled the other, “thou speakest truly, yet being a loyal subject to the King will I not sit here when such matters be stirring. Wilt thou go with me, Wilhelm?”

“What wilt thou do now?”

“To the great oak, forsooth. As thou seest, the moon be very bright, yet hidden

by the shadow of the trees, I warrant there be none who perceive us.

"Then," said the Lieutenant, "I will go with thee, but methinks that we find but a lover's meeting for our pains."

"The Princess hath no lovers," replied the other sternly, "'tis a trick, I tell thee, yet being a woman she hath no fear of it; would there were a dozen instead of two of us."

Now methinks I did a thing wherein there was little reason, for what had I, a stranger in Schleswig, to do with the Princess's business? Yet being alone, as I have said, and the time hanging heavily upon my hands, there came to me a sudden resolve that three instead of two should be present near the great oak where the Princess had promised to hold a tryst. Therefore when the officers had departed in much haste, I did buckle on my sword and thrusting a pistol into my pocket, descended unto the room where Master Schwerin was engaged in counting up the profits of the day. Upon catching sight of me he arose quickly, his hand upon his heart.

"Master Landlord," said I, forestalling that which he would have said, "it doth please me that I take an airing, and having heard much concerning a certain great oak

tree beyond the walls, would pray that thou direct me thither."

He showed much surprise at my request, but replied quickly:

"'Tis some two thousand paces beyond the gate that faces to the west, yet 'twould be more fitting that your Excellency take one of the servants, for by order of the King none do pass into the city after nightfall."

Here, then, was something that I had not bargained for, yet what matter were I to pass the night without the walls? So questioning him further that I might not mistake the way, I made haste to follow the footsteps of the King's officers. The guard who watched the gate barred the way when I would have passed, demanding who I was, and wherefore alone and on foot I left the city at that hour.

"I am indeed but lately arrived in Schleswig," said I, and hearing from one Captain Von Francius, who may be known to thee, that the moonlight upon the forest is very beautiful I would—"

The guard dropped the point of his weapon. "Then thou be he who did accompany the Captain hither; I have heard concerning thee, for, in truth, this same captain was the leader of my company in the wars that are passed. Yet knowst thou not, that ere sunrise the gates be closed to

them who have not the password to enter the city?"

"Thou wert then of les enfants d'enfer?" said I smiling.

He grinned broadly. "Ach!" he replied, "the Captain was ever proud of his children. Thou art an Englishman?"

"That be I," said I, "wast ever in England?"

No," said he, "yet I have seen many of thy countrymen during the war in France; I do remember well a certain burly rogue, one Red Thomas by name—"

"Who is even now with me in Schleswig, I interrupted, "and if perchance he cometh this way, thou wilt tell him quietly that Hal Martant doth go to the great oak—"

"Donnerwetter!" he cried, "thou makest the fifth since sunset, nicht wahr?"

But being in much haste I replied carelessly, and left him gazing after me in the moonlight.

The great oak to which my errand led me was well known throughout all the King's territory, both on account of its size, and 'twas beneath its branches that Rupert the First had signed that treaty which declared peace between Schleswig and its southern neighbor Holstein. The great tree stood some two thousand paces from the gate of the city, close unto the

border of the forest, and according to an edict issued by the old King there was built no dwelling of any description nigher to its trunk than five hundred paces. Having then passed through the gate of the city, I did take my way in that direction, heeding that as I approached the shadow of the forest I turned me from the main highway into a narrow footpath, where the trees bordering on the road hid me from any who perchance might look that way, for, thought I, there be those abroad who know not Captain Von Francius, and would look with some suspicion upon my errand, it not being the custom in Schleswig, for gentlemen to walk beyond the city after nightfall. As I approached unto the great oak there suddenly came to my ears the ring of steel, and with it the fierce breathing of men as if engaged in mortal combat.

Here then was like to be an adventure I wotted not of, and for a better understanding of the matter, I crept cautiously along the border of the wood, until I reached a spot some sixty paces from them who fought, and that which I beheld is fixed in my memory even unto this day.

Beyond the shadow cast by the fringe of the forest, and in a circle of clear moonlight which made the place wellnigh as plain as day, contended five men, four on

the one side and but a single sword opposing, the owner thereof standing with his back against a tree, and slashing about him as though with supernatural power in his wrist. Upon the ground lay three others, two at the very feet of him who fought alone, and the third a little way off, almost in the shadow of the great tree which rose to the height of many feet above the surrounding forest. But 'twas not those who fought, nor the dead men, who first drew my attention; 'twas another figure who stood watching the unequal conflict from a point not ten paces from where I crouched, and the moonlight shining bright upon her face, I saw that which did so set my heart beating, I feared it might sound even above the clashing of the weapons.

I had heard that the King's sister was very beautiful, nor did the tongue of rumor overrun its mark. Before me, and so near that I could catch the quick gasp of her breath, stood the Princess Alice, one white hand upon the pommel of her saddle, the other grasping in terror a slender goldmounted riding whip, her only weapon of defense. I have seen many women in my time, and there be those more beautiful than the daughter of the House of Schleswig, yet her picture is ever first in my heart; a tall slender figure

clad in habit of some dark cloth, the delicate tracery of lace at her throat and wrists, scarcely discernible against the ivory whiteness of the fair skin. Her dark hair, from which the plumed hat had fallen, was gathered back from the clear-cut features, cold and proud even in their terror, while the little head poised defiantly upon the slender neck, and the flash of the dark eyes bespoke the blood of kings, and a race long unconquerable. Suddenly I bethought me there hung a sword at my side, and perchance, though the odds be very great, a bold rush might end the matter quickly. As in that distant wood in England, I had sprung forward to meet I knew not what, so in the shadow of the great Schleswig forest I whipped out my blade and holding the pistol in my left hand, did spring with a shout straight into the circle of moonlight wherein the five fought so desperately. With my coming the Princess uttered a little cry, and the four who contended against the one drew back, thinking perchance that a company of the King's soldiers followed close at my heels. In that moment was the battle won, for discharging my pistol at the one nearest, I spilt open the head of the second, coming as I did upon their flank where an attack was least expected.

Then, perceiving help at hand, he who stood against the tree struck out more fiercely, till in terror, and wotting not what had befallen them, those of the enemy who remained, wheeled quickly about, and fled into the fastness of the forest. As I turned to follow, he whom I had shot, and who was but wounded in the thigh, struck at me fiercely with his great sword, and the blade turning in his hand, I received the flat of it upon the head, whereupon my senses left me.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW MAJOR KRATZ FOUGHT FOR THE KING.

It was the sound of a familiar voice which aroused me from my swoon.

"S'blood!" it said, "he was ever of such a temper that there be no shadow of reason in him; yet he be not dead, only stunned by a blow upon the pate, such as are oft given and received in my own country."

"Ach!" replied another, "'tis as thou sayst, and right glad am I, for so fiercely did he charge down upon them, that methought there were a score of trusty blades at his back. 'Tis a good night's work for him, Herr Comrade?"

"And for thou!" growled the voice of Red Tom, "else wouldst thou ere this have had three feet of steel in thy vitals." Then, bending over me, "Tut mon gar, 'tis but such a blow as one would give thee in friendly jousting; art hurt elsewhere, mon comrade?"

"No," stammered I half rising on my elbow, "'tis the force of it that overthrew me, yet, the Princess—"

Even as I spoke she advanced quickly

through the moonlight and laid her hand half caressingly upon my forehead.

"Thou hast indeed saved me," said she almost in a whisper, yet her voice was the sweetest I had ever heard. "And I thank thee in the King's name for that which thou hast done this night; if there's any gift in Schleswig—"

I broke in upon her. "Madame," said I, "what I did was as a soldier and a gentleman."

She drew herself up proudly but of a sudden grew soft again.

"I did speak but hastily," said she, "thou art not as many who be in my brother's service; thou wilt then forgive—"

"Princess!" cried he who had contended against the four, "'tis not for thee to ask forgiveness."

A smile touched the corners of her mouth. "Ah, Major Kratz!" said she "thou wert ever a stern believer in discipline, yet did I speak unthinkingly."

"And," burst out Red Tom, "'tis as be-fitteth a royal princess. S'blood—"

"Peace," cried the Princess haughtily, "'tis a matter which concerns thee little, yet to this gentleman would I make amends."

I had risen to my feet and bending down kissed the hand she held out to me. "'Tis

scarce beholden that thy servants should raise their voice in the presence of a Princess," said I, "yet my comrade being an old soldier who hath fought in many wars, perchance he doth—"

She laughed merrily. "Truth!" said she, "and therefore it cometh from the heart. He be forgiven then without the asking; but tell me, Sir—"

"Martant," I replied, "though my father being yet alive—"

"Sir Martant," she interrupted, "for such wilt thou be in Schleswig. Tell me, I pray, by what chance didst thou come so opportunely?"

Whereupon I did relate to her that which concerned the conversation of the two officers in the garden of Master Schwerin.

A merry twinkle stole into her eyes. "Forsooth," cried she, "I little thought that such watch dogs lay in waiting. Come, Major Kratz, what sayeth thou?"

"My Princess," quoth he, "'twas in my mind that some plot be hatching, therefore I did follow after thee, fearing that the Duke—"

Her face grew hard as stone. "Ah! the Duke," cried she sharply, "'twere well that this matter reach not the ears of the King, else methinks there be a public hanging in the square at Schleswig."

Then holding out her hand to the Major: "But thou hast well proven thy loyalty this night, and fear not, for the King shall hear concerning it; would there were a thousand gentlemen in Schleswig like thee."

The lines of the Major's mouth softened. "Methinks," said he, "that this be but an evil place for a princess, therefore if it please thee to return to the city, I will accompany thee thither, and afterward, with the help of these gentlemen, will hide the traces of the night's adventure. 'Twere well that they who be slain be not left abroad for the sight of any who may perchance pass on the morrow."

"As thou wilt," replied the Princess, thoughtfully, "yet would I have this gentleman accompany me, thou and the other—"

Major Kratz looked hard upon the ground. "Thou art the Princess," said he humbly, "yet methinks—"

"Then," said she, "being the Princess, I would choose who doth accompany me; there is the horse of him who came with me unto this place."

Whereupon the other said nothing, and yet half dazed with the blow I had received, and the honor the Princess did me, I made haste to climb into the saddle, and

falling in behind her, turned my way toward the city gate once more.

For a time the Princess said not a word, yet ere we had gone half the journey, she made known her wish that I ride nearer to her side.

"Sir Englishman," said she soberly, "I am much beholden to thee this night, yet I would know wherefore thou didst come to Schleswig."

"Madame," said I, "there be one Captain Von Francius by name, a citizen of Schleswig, who happening to be in England, and hearing that I desired adventure, did recommend that I journey in his company into thy kingdom, when, he told me the King would perchance have certain use for my sword."

"Ah!" said she turning her eyes upon me searchingly, "then thou didst wish to serve the King, but what concerning this Captain of whom thou speakest? Methinks that I owe him something also."

Seeing the opportunity I did go into such parts of my comrade's history as was befitting for the ears of a royal princess. When I had finished she smiled faintly.

"The King, my brother, shall hear of him," said she, "there be not too many in Schleswig such as thou paintest this Von Francius."

By this time we had drawn near unto the gate of the city and my companion ended her conversation for indeed it was not fitting that any should know the Princess was abroad. Therefore she having given to me the password, I did speak it to the guards, whereupon the gate was opened to us, and although the watchers stared curiously, we rode in unmolested. Being once more within the city the Princess did turn to me.

"'Twere well," said she, "that I leave thee here, for all danger is now passed." She held out one little gloved hand, yet when I would have kissed it drew back quickly.

"Forget for to-night that thou hast seen a Princess," said she softly, "rather that it be the woman who hast spoken to thee;" and with that she left me. Whereupon I was much surprised yet when I came to know her better I marveled not at her varying moods, for at the same moment she could be both gay and serious, cold and warm. But as to that, are there any among us who do fully understand a woman?

It being yet some hours before the morning, and thinking I should find Captain Von Francius at our lodgings, I made haste thither, nor was I mistaken, for before the door of the inn walked my comrade, a

frown upon his brow, and his sword jingling at every step.

"Ho!" cried he on catching sight of me, "so thou hast returned and astride thy horseflesh I—"

Then perceiving more clearly he let out a great German oath: "Zounds; 'tis the King's trappings, hast thou then—"

"Not so loudly," I replied, "wouldst thou arouse the neighborhood with thy bellowing?"

He followed me to the stable quietly, when having seen to the comfort of the beast, I picked up the saddle which bore the King's mark and returned to the inn, once more the Captain following. Having closed the door of my room so that none might hear, I did as briefly as possible relate to him the night's adventure, yet having finished he replied nothing, and fearing that amazement had taken away his voice, I made haste to shake him roughly by the shoulder.

"Come!" said I, "what thinkst thou?"

"And I was not with thee," he muttered, "now may the devil take me for a—" Whereupon the fit seized hold of him and for the space of half an hour he would answer nothing.

All patience was fast leaving me, when there came a great clatter upon the stairs,

the door of the room swung violently open, and Red Tom, followed by Major Kratz, appeared on the threshold.

"S'blood!" cried the former, "we be that dry that were the river Eider within the room thou shouldst see its bottom presently; wouldst thou have us perish?" And having drained the flask that I made haste to snatch from the table, they threw themselves, dirt stained as they were, upon the white counterpane with which Mistress Schwerin had provided me.

"By the crown of England!" roared Red Tom, "in truth have I turned grave digger. S'blood! was it then for this—"

Then did the Captain regain his spirits and laughed so heartily that I presently lifted my voice also, but upon the face of Major Kratz there broke no smile and we perceiving the seriousness of his countenance checked our merriment.

"'Twere well," said he gruffly, "to consider many things, and 'twas for that I did come hither; thou being my countryman, who art called Von Francius, I would ask thee plainly, be thou for the King?"

The Captain's hand went to his sword hilt, whereupon the other smiled grimly.

"Tut, comrade," said he, "thou hast answered me after my own fashion; thou hast heard concerning—"

"Yes!" I replied, "'twere but now that—"

"Then," said the Major, "thou knowest wherein liest much danger. To-day all Schleswig may know that the Duke of Friedrichsstadt hath sought to carry off the Princess.

The Captain struck his fist heavily upon the table. "But wherefore?" said he, "the Duke would scarce cry out his own undoing."

Major Kratz shook his head. "Thou didst but of late come unto Schleswig," said he, "there be many who would seize the occasion for open warfare, and the King but scarcely seated on his throne."

Therefore for some little space we did consult together, resolving in our minds to say naught concerning that which had taken place at the border of the forest; for, as Major Kratz explained 'twould need but a spark to bring that about which would do much injury to the King. Therefore having come to an agreement concerning the matter I made bold to ask the King's officer to relate to us that which had happened 'twixt his leaving of the garden, and the moment when I fell upon his adversaries beyond the walls. At first he would have put me off with a light

answer, but at length did relate that which I sought to know.

Upon leaving the garden, then, the Major and his younger companion had hastened with all speed to the western gate of the city, intent only upon reaching the trysting place agreed upon by the Princess as quickly as possible. Upon passing outside the walls they had followed much the same method that I had adopted, whereupon they also approached the great tree unperceived. As fate would have it, the Princess had been delayed in her errand, so that the two officers entered the edge of the forest, and had concealed themselves among the trees, ere she, accompanied by one attendant, appeared, riding at a canter along the highway. When she drew near unto the oak, three men, each covered by a great cloak, stepped out from the shadow of the forest into the circle of moonlight, and a little way further on two more, who placed themselves between the Princess and the gate of the city.

Perceiving the three who did await, she drew herself up most haughtily, and plucking a letter from her bosom, said certain words to them who confronted her, but the purport of these reached not the ears of the Major or his companion. Straightway one of the men replied:

"His Highness was detained upon certain weighty business, yet he did bid us to accompany thee to the lodge which lieth some two miles yet further on, and—"

The Princess upon hearing this gathered up her bridle rein.

"'Tis then but a trick," said she coldly, "yet might I have expected something of this fashion knowing who be your master."

Thereupon one of the men did laugh, and when the Princess would have returned whence she came, the two who had stolen up behind her blocked the way. Then she suddenly raised her riding whip and with it slashed one of them who would have detained her, across the face.

"Gently!" cried he who appeared to be the leader, "else some harm may come to thee, princess though thou be. Best go with us quietly."

Then the Princess knew that she was indeed caught in a trap, and replied not a word, nor made any outcry, but he who had accompanied her drew his sword and struck boldly at the man who had addressed his mistress, whereupon three of the five drew their blades also, and the odds being more than one man could contend against he was speedily slain. It was at this point that the Major and his companion did rush out from their hiding place.

For a time the fight waxed fierce, though the odds lay heavy against the King's officers, and presently the Lieutenant was thrust through the body, the Major being then left alone with his back against a tree, yet striking out fiercely for the honor of his King. 'Twas about this time that I so happily turned the tide of battle in the Princess's favor.

"S'blood!" cried Red Tom when the Major had ceased speaking, "'twas the guard who told me, I chancing to pass that way, that a certain friend of mine, a very bold and outspoken young man, did leave a message summoning me to the great oak where there was like to be a matter of some consideration. Yet fast as I ran had I been sooner—"

"Thou didst come most opportunely," broke in the Major, "for surely I thought Herr Martant had followed my companion."

"'Twas a sturdy blow dealt with most murderous intent," replied Red Tom, "yet methinks but little harm came of it."

"And I," quoth Captain Von Francius, dashing his hat up on the table, "did tarry behind like a Flemish wasch-frau amid her soapsuds."

Whereupon he strode sullenly from our presence, nor did we see him again that night.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE THREE SWORE FEALTY TO THE KING.

When the sun was high in the heavens on the morning following the adventure wherein I had met the Princess Alice, I was awakened by the voice of Master Schwerin calling to me through the key-hole. Now I was exceeding weary, therefore demanded in a manner more surly than was my custom, who had need of me, that my slumbers were disturbed so rudely.

"'Tis a messenger from the Court," replied the landlord humbly, "else would I have sent him about his business, that thy Excellency be not disturbed; I pray thee—"

"Enough!" cried I, springing quickly out of bed, "thou wilt show him hither, Master Landlord, yet methinks he will find in me a poor entertainer."

Presently there entered the room a young man of about my own age, clad in the uniform of a colonel of infantry, and wearing upon his breast an Order which proclaimed that he was of the nobility.

"Be seated, sir!" cried I, "thou dost indeed find me in a most unbecoming condi-

tion; yet being heavy with sleep and expecting no visitors—”

The newcomer laughed good naturedly.

“Faith!” said he, “there be little reason to apologize, having spent the night in most warlike occupation I warrant that thy limbs be somewhat stiffened, yet do I come on business of much import.”

“From the King?” said I.

He raised his eyebrows and smiled more broadly. “From the King!” said he, “or rather from the Princess, whom methinks is much beholden to thee.”

“Then thou knowst,” said I.

“In truth!” said he, “and were it not the Princess Alice, methinks there might be some gentle ending to the matter.”

I understood his meaning and frowned darkly.

“Thou art ill advised,” said I, “nor would the King have sent thee hither, had he known that thy tongue did run to riddles. What may be thy business?”

He flushed very red, tapping his foot impatiently upon the floor.

“Zounds!” cried he, “thou art indeed an exceeding bold fellow, yet—”

He checked himself suddenly. “Ach!” he cried, “I do outrun myself, yet thy humor doth provoke me.”

Here then was a pretty piece of business,

that a messenger from the King, to whom I had been of much service, should lecture me in my own citadel.

"Sir!" I proceeded, "thou art from the King, and for that reason would I respect thy person; yet am I my own master, and—"

He burst into a merry fit of laughter.

"Zounds!" cried he, "thou art indeed exceeding hot blooded. Cool thyself therefore, that we may speak in all seriousness; would thou serve the King?"

"'Twas for that I came to Schleswig," replied I sullenly.

"Then," said he, "I may indeed be some use to thee, and forsooth, the King will take much pleasure in thy company."

"'Twere not as a courtier, but as a soldier that I would serve his Majesty," said I.

His eyes twinkled merrily, "'Twas such an answer I expected, the Princess did speak well concerning thee; hast thou seen the King?"

I would have answered him sharply for his manner offended me, yet there was that in his blue eyes, and in the jovial expression of his countenance which checked my anger.

"No," I replied, "being yet a stranger in Schleswig."

"Then," said he, "there is something yet

before thee, and moreover, if it be thy pleasure, methinks he will have found in thee a loyal follower; the times be troublous and the King is ever ready to reward him who would protect his honor."

I would have replied as seemed most fitting, for I did consider that perchance he stood very near unto the throne, when there arose a great noise without, and through the doorway burst Captain Von Francius with Red Tom at his heels.

"What!" cried the former, "still snoring and the King awaiting thee? Ach! man, dost thou not know a summons from the palace—"

Then catching sight of him who was with me, his hat came off in an instant, and the sentence died in his throat. He who wore the colonel's uniform drew himself up haughtily.

"Thou art then—"said he.

"Thy servant and faithful subject," stammered the Captain, growing very red about the ears. "God save the King!"

"What?" cried I, "art thou—"

"Forsooth, thy friend," he replied laughing heartily, "I did but desire to know concerning thee." Whereupon he held out his hand smiling at the amazement on our faces. Bethinking that I had used him

rudely he in truth being a king, I did seek to make amends but he checked me.

"It hath ever been our habit," said he, "to discover in a man that which best became him, therefore knowing that all have two faces, one for the King, another for his equals, we did come to thee as thou perceivest."

And I learned afterward that such was indeed his custom, for while yet the Prince he did mingle with the common people, whereby he learned much concerning the temper of the kingdom; and being yet scarce six months on the throne, his old habits yet clung, although there were certain among his counselors who much opposed such a descent from dignity, for they held, and not without reason, that being the King, it were more befitting he lay aside boyish pranks, which ill accorded with his high station. Be that as it may, here I found myself, clad only in night dress and breeches, in the presence of him who filled the throne of Schleswig, and to serve whom I had crossed three countries. As to Captain Von Francius and Red Tom, so amazed were they, that they uttered not a word.

Presently the smile died from the King's eyes and crossing over to the window he looked silently out upon the garden; as for

us, awaiting his pleasure, we spoke nothing as befitted them who stood in the presence of royalty.

Having finished his examination and, as I think gathered together the threads of the plan running in his head, he turned quickly about and looked hard upon us.

"Methinks," said he, "that there be no treason here, yet are we told that throughout all the city of Schleswig there's not a dozen habitations wherein the Duke of Friedrichsstadt hath not sought to sow the seeds of discord."

I saw the Captain's lips frame an oath, but the presence of the King restrained him, and perceiving that we said nothing His Majesty continued:

"Having therefore heard from our sister the Princess that three gentlemen have journeyed from the Isle of Britain unto Schleswig, to place their swords at the disposal of the King, we have come, even as it may seem unbefitting to thee, to speak in person concerning certain grave matters of which the people as yet know nothing, and above all concerning a matter which toucheth closely the honor of our house."

The Captain still remaining silent, I made haste to answer for the company, assuring the King that our lives if needed

would be offered for the cause of which he spake.

"'Tis well," replied he soberly, "yet methinks, Sir Englishman, that there be more beside; 'tis for the honor of the Princess that thou wouldst enter into this agreement with me."

"The Princess?" cried I, taken aback at this sudden turn in the conversation.

"Ay" said he smiling at the warmth of my question, "'twere an honor that would unsheath a thousand swords in Schleswig this day, yet from among all them who serve us we would choose the three comrades for such an errand."

"Be it for thy Majesty or Her Highness the Princess" broke in Captain Von Francius, "our swords are ever ready to carry the argument, as befitteth the King's servants."

The King nodded gravely. "'Tis as we thought," said he, "for the Princess hath ever been a good judge of them who would best serve her, and 'tis she who recommended our coming hither; knowest thou this Duke of Friedrichsstadt?"

"I have but seen him," replied the Captain, "yet my comrades—"

"'Tis well!" broke in the King, "knowest thou then that he hath a brother?"

"The rumor hath reached my ears," replied the Captain shortly.

Then the King did make known to us that which was in his mind, and what he told unto us is yet fresh in my memory.

There was a younger branch of the House of Friedrichsstadt, a youth of about my own age, fitting companion for his elder brother, and withal a person of much comeliness, yet with a heart as black as his face was fair to look upon. Having seen the Princess Alice, this villain had resolved in his own mind to obtain her for himself, which desire so tickled the fancy of the Duke, that he entered most willingly into the other's plans, and now there was opposed to the Princess, two as crafty villains as ever put foot in stirrup. Having thrice made bold to press his suit, and thrice repulsed by the Princess, the Duke's brother, Sir Karl by name, did swear a great oath that in the end she should marry him, the more so that his brother would be king of Schleswig. Therefore the Princess was in much danger, and the matter coming to the ears of the King, he had forbidden her to venture abroad after nightfall. Having disobeyed him and, as I have related, well nigh carried off by the servants of the Duke, it came into the mind of the King that not only was

his throne in danger, but also the honor of his sister, which was dearer to him than all else. It was concerning this matter then, that he had come secretly to my chamber for, he told us, there lay much danger were we to be seen about the palace, for the Duke's spies were everywhere and it were better for the success of the undertaking that none should know we were in the service of the Princess. There was, however, one other who knew the King's errand, and that was Major Kratz. As to his loyalty there was no question.

Having told to us that for which he had laid aside his royal dignity and had visited, unattended, the house of one of his most humble subjects, King Rupert the Third arose, holding out to us the cross-hilt of his sword, and we did one after another, beginning with the Captain, swear to him on it that our lives, if needed, would be rendered up for the honor of the Princess. As to that which was in the mind of Captain Von Francius, or of Red Tom, I knew nothing; but this I did know, that in my heart lay those words wherein she bade me forget she was a princess, and think only it was the woman who had spoken.

Together with the oath I had taken to

serve the King and his household, I registered a second, that come what might, be it weal or woe, whatever of strength lay within me would be freely given for the honor of the daughter of the House of Schleswig; and that vow have I never broken unto this day.

Having finished his business with us, the King did make ready to go, saying only that ere evening we would hear further on the matter.

When he had gone Red Tom smote his fist violently upon his thigh, so that the Captain and I gazed upon him in astonishment.

"S'blood!" cried he, "'tis indeed a pretty custom thou hast in this kingdom of thine Friend Fritz, that the King himself doth extend to us so hearty a greeting."

And the Captain being much puffed up at such honor done him, straightway sent to Master Schwerin and ordered to be set before us three flasks of wine and we did drink to the King's health, to that of the Princess Alice, to the good fortune that had befallen us, and to the success of our errand. In the midst of our merriment there came a knock at the door whereupon answering the summons, I perceived one of the servants of the house standing without, who bore in his hand a sealed letter

addressed to Captain Von Francius. Having broken the seal and read that which was written he smote with his hand upon the table.

"Zounds!" cried he, "'tis come in good time; what think you, comrades, if there be threescore sturdy blades at our backs in this adventure?"

"What?" said I, "hath the King then—"

"'Tis not the King," roared Von Francius, "'tis mes enfants d'enfer who will join our company."

"But," said I, "was it not the King's wish that the matter be kept in all secrecy?"

"Faith," he replied, "to that I am agreed, is it necessary that each rogue of the company know concerning that which is in the minds of the leaders? There be times indeed when we work alone, yet others, when mes enfants will join us right merrily. Said I not that there be some remaining in Schleswig whose swords would not rest idly in their scabbards?"

For a better understanding of the matter he read to us the letter that had been brought, and in it certain of his old company agreed to meet him with sixty men on the evening of that day, whereby a plan might be arrived at, in which the King would be none the loser.

As the Captain explained, he had secretly seen certain of his old comrades and they had with one voice besought him to gather together the company, for there was like to be much bloody diversion let loose presently.

Les enfants d'enfer being to a man loyal to the King, the Duke of Friedrichsstadt would perchance find a hard nut to crack at the very outset.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW CAPTAIN VON FRANCIUS MET HIS COMPANY.

It was late in the afternoon of the day upon which I had for the first time seen the King of Schleswig, that the Captain, Red Tom and I received that instruction which his Majesty had promised us, and the bearer of the message from the palace to the house of Master Schwerin, was Major Kratz. Now, as I have said, there was this in the King's mind in choosing us from among all his subjects to guard the Princess, that we were strangers to the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, and in this very thing lay the kernel of the undertaking. Were it known to the Duke that a guard had been set apart for the better protection of the Princess, he might have turned for the moment from his plotting against the throne, in order to remove such an obstacle from his brother's ambition; forsooth methinks that in this thing the King showed great wisdom, for what chance had we, being but three, against the cunning of a disciple of the evil one?

In his message the King did moreover make clear to us, that not only could we serve the Princess according to the oath we had taken, but perchance, in the carrying out of the errand, the safety of the throne itself might be much strengthened.

He had planned that one or two of us should go unto the castle wherein dwelt the Duke and his brother, and making known that we had but recently come into Schleswig from foreign parts, might obtain service under the Master of Friedrichsstadt, and so more easily discover something concerning the plot whereby the Princess was to be delivered into the hands of him who sought to dishonor her, and the royal house of Schleswig.

It was plainly to be perceived, that in furthering the ends of his brother to obtain possession of the Princess, the Duke hoped thereby to bring about that which was in his heart, for she, being carried away against her will, there would remain but one course open to the King; to declare war against those who had dishonored him, whereby many there were, who would cast their fortunes in with the house of Friedrichsstadt, the King being first to begin the matter. But, on the other hand, were the Duke to strike the first blow, 'twould, in truth, be treason, which might

set some in Schleswig to thinking, as it was no light matter to draw sword in so wretched a business. It was this selfsame argument that Major Kratz did lay before us.

"S'blood!" growled Red Tom, the Major having thus delivered himself, "there be so much of truth in what thou sayst that the Lord High Chancellor of England himself, who is considered a most knowing personage, could scarce have done better; yet there is one thing which is exceeding clear to me."

"And what be that, forsooth?" asked the Captain.

"That there be but one of us who can go into the lair of the Wolf," replied Red Tom gruffly, "and that in truth is myself." ■

"And why thou?" broke out the Captain angrily. "Am I then yet a child that—"

"S'blood! comrade," said Red Tom, gently, "wherefore so quick with thy temper? To my mind it seemeth after this fashion. Thou, forsooth, being a citizen of Schleswig, and perchance known to certain of the Duke's followers, might presently find thyself by the ears, and being thus quickly discovered 'twould be little good thy planning would do to either the King or to us. Concerning this passionate fellow whom I have known with

some understanding these many years, methinks that did a word against the Princess fall from the lips of any among the Duke's household, his sword would be out in a twinkling, whereupon there would be a speedy ending to his errand. Yet, I, being unknown to them who serve the Duke, and having been in some slight danger during my lifetime, all might go well with me."

"Zounds!" cried the Major, "thou art indeed possessed of much wisdom and, forsooth, there will be none, I warrant, who can gainsay thee."

To this we agreed, although I liked not his remarks concerning my hot headedness, yet I recognized that there was much truth in his argument, for methinks, even as he had said, 'twould have gone exceeding ill with anyone who in my presence did speak against the Princess.

It was agreed then, that Red Tom should set out on the morrow for Friedrichsstadt, while Captain Von Francius and I remained in Schleswig. Having thus settled the matter, Major Kratz returned to make it known to the King.

This business being finished the Captain did turn his attention to that other affair which touched him, and through him, us also, it being the meeting of the comrades

remaining from those who had followed him in the late wars.

There are in Schleswig many great buildings given up to the storing of merchandise, for, as I have said, the city was at the time of which I write, a place of much enterprise among the commercial centres of the North. These selfsame buildings, or storehouses, being only open in the day and, moreover, situate near unto the border of the harbor, in which place there were few abroad after nightfall, were most fitting in which to assemble a large body of men who desired that their coming together be not known through out the capital. As chance would have it, some of the men who guarded these storehouses by night, and who possessed the means of entrance thereto, were part of the sixty who had agreed to meet the Captain, whereby a plan might be perfected for the reorganization of the company. Hence 'twas to one of these buildings that Von Francius conducted us some six hours after the Major had returned to deliver our answer to the King.

It was at a great door close to the margin of the water's edge that the Captain knocked thrice with the handle of his sword, whereupon there was a shuffling of feet within, and a gruff voice demanded

who disturbed the peace of the neighborhood at so unseemly an hour. The Captain replying something in the French tongue, a rattling of chains followed and the door being opened a very little there appeared the face of him I had met at the western gate of the city; 'twas he who had been stationed by the company to await our coming. When he perceived that it was Captain Von Francius who stood without, and close behind him Red Tom and I, he chuckled softly, and made way that we might enter.

Having passed through half the length of the building we came at length to the cellar, a great room extending for many feet in either direction, and in this place was assembled those who had agreed to meet their old leader that they might consult with him concerning the future of the company. The great hall was but poorly lighted by half a dozen torches, yet I could make out that sixty or more rough-clad fellows reclined about on trusses of straw, their jackets thrown open, and heads bare, for the heat of the place was very great. At every man's side lay a two-handled sword, which, the Captain made clear to me afterward, had been the companion of each in the late war. These, with the steel caps and dingy breastplates, scattered

about upon the stone floor, bore witness that les enfants d'enfer were in truth ready to follow that very night, if need be, their old Captain, whose presence had turned their thoughts to the days of the war.

Never have I witnessed a more goodly gathering, either in England or throughout the whole of Europe itself, and 'twas in the midst of these threescore hardy veterans that I found myself, as, close at the Captain's elbow, I passed under the low-vaulted door which marked the entrance to the cellar.

There had, perchance, been but little said among those who awaited us, ere the coming of their leader, but no sooner did Captain Von Francius thrust himself through the doorway than there arose a shout, that, had we been in the street above, would have brought the King's guards flocking about our ears. As to the Captain, his face turned of a sudden exceeding red, and I perceived that his lips trembled under the cover of his beard, therefore I knew that he was greatly moved, although he sought to hide it.

When the company perceived that he said nothing, each man seized his sword and clashing the blade against that of his neighbor, there came about such ringing of steel the like of which I had never

heard, and Red Tom whispered to me that such was indeed a common greeting in Germany. Seeing that he, alone, could check their wild demonstration, the Captain pulled himself together and turned toward that part of his former followers from whose throats issued the roughest welcome.

"I had heard," said he speaking very gruffly, "that there were yet in Schleswig those who would find it great pleasure to draw sword in behalf of our Master, the King; forsooth, methinks I have been rightly informed."

"'Tis even so," bawled a huge fellow who seemed to be leader among them, "we have waited too long already."

"Not so," cried the Captain, "else the trap would be sprung too quick: the Wolf is very cunning, the King very young; but how many are here gathered together?"

"All that there be of the company in Schleswig," replied the lieutenant. "Of the hundred who rode home from the war, a score are dead, and as many more have taken service in foreign parts; but be yon great fellow one Red Thomas, who doth grin so broadly at thy sword arm?"

"Faith," cried Red Tom stepping forward toward the company, "thou art in-

deed a person of much perception; S'blood! I have ever dreamed of this day."

"Then in truth there be but thirty of the old company missing," cried a voice in the crowd, "thou wert ever equal to ten men, thou gentle Geldwechsler."

At that a great roar went up, for during the last war in France there were many who found their pockets the lighter for having fallen in with my countryman; yet, as Red Tom would have it, the collecting of ransom was a thing given by right of conquest to him whose sword gained the mastery.

"Donerwetter," growled the Captain, "have we then come together for such idle chattering? Red Tom it be indeed, whom I found flying toward London as though the devil himself was at his heels, and with him Master Martant, here, whom I recommend unto the company, seeing that I have much warrant of him, he being a comrade, and as ourselves a follower of the King."

'Twas thus I became, without undue bickering, a member of "les enfants d'enfer" and the company coming at length to order Captain Von Francius thus addressed them:

"There be, as you know, two parties in Schleswig, one who serves the King, the other the whelps of a certain Wolf. Hav-

ing therefore cast in our lots with them who seek to uphold the honor of the throne, I would that those among you who be of a mind to follow me in this matter, hold aloft each his sword."

There straightway followed a mighty clattering of steel, and sixty blades flashed in the light of the torches, so that the very cellar itself seemed bristling with arms. The Captain smiled grimly.

"Thou wert ever my children," said he proudly, "and I warrant me that the Wolf take much reckoning of thee hereafter. Yet for the present 'twere best that each return to his different occupation in peace, and when the time be ripe, I will again summon you together."

Having therefore thus directed them, the Captain departed as he had come, Red Tom and I following, leaving the company with their heads together discussing that which had come to pass. Reaching the street once more we made our way with all speed to the inn, nor did a word pass between us until again under the shelter of Master Schwerin's roof.

CHAPTER X.

HOW A STRANGER CAME INTO FRIEDRICHS-STADT.

What I know concerning the journey of Red Tom to the castle of Freidrichsstadt and what there befell him, came from his own lips, the event being yet fresh in his memory when he did relate them unto me. Having made careful note of the matter, it touching my errand into Schleswig very closely, and also something of the welfare of the Princess Alice and of her brother the King, it were of a truth unbefitting that it be passed lightly over, although methinks had Red Tom his choice it would go no further.

Having risen early in the morning of the day following that on which we had met the King, my countryman carefully looked to his harness, that nothing be wanting during his sojourn in the country where dwelt, as Captain Von Francius termed him, the Wolf. We also were up betimes, the former that he might speak to his comrade concerning certain customs of the country, and I to wish him God speed in his uncertain under-

taking. We saw him safely mounted, a smile upon his lips and the great sword clanking merrily at his side. Having bidden us farewell, promising to return in good time, if forsooth at all, he set the roan mare on her way, and presently turning a bend in the street we saw him no more. Then the Captain looked for a time upon the ground, and muttered an oath, nor for the space of an hour would he reply to my questionings. As to myself, there came suddenly a certain mist before my eyes, so that all things grew dim; neither am I ashamed that I did so play the woman for, forsooth, Red Tom was very dear to me, the Wolf very cunning, and I perceived not at all the ending of the matter.

Now, during this time, he for whom we feared, rode cheerily through the streets of Schleswig, humming a French love song, the same that had been taught him by a certain damsel in Calais. Arriving at the western gate of the city, he passed the guard unchallenged, and turned his horse's head in that direction which lay toward the dukedom of Friedrichsstadt. Straightway an adventure befell him.

Having ridden along the King's highway some half league, there appeared at a bend of the road two persons who were plodding onward, with faces toward Schleswig and

eyes bent upon their sandals. As they drew nearer Red Tom perceived that they were indeed monks of an order common throughout the kingdom, there being situate some half a score of miles from the capital city, the Abbey of Blenheim being the recipient of much favor from the royal house, the walls of the structure having been completed in the early years of the reign of the King's grandfather.

Supposing that they were but two humble churchmen on their way to the city, Red Tom would have passed them by with a rough word of greeting, but one of them barred the way, crying in a whining voice that for the love of God he give unto them something for the poor.

"Faith!" replied the horseman, "that would I gladly, such as I may, yet my pocket being exceeding light, methinks 'twould fare ill with him who perchance looked to me for silver pieces."

"Nay, good soldier," quoth the monk, "'tis indeed but little that we ask of thee; has it not been written in the Holy Book that the widow's mite—"

"S'blood!" cried Red Tom, "thou hast me there, for being from my boyhood given over to arms, 'tis little I comprehend beyond that which pertaineth to warlike matters. Yet if there be a widow as thou sayst,

who did give unto the poor forsooth it be most befitting that I fall not behind; yet will I give that which be better than alms. Go then thou straightway unto the certain inn kept by one Master Schwerin, and there inquire for Sir Harold Martant, a man of much piety, and one, forsooth, much given to charity. Methinks then wilt thou receive enough and to spare."

"Good son," cried the monk, "the Church is much beholden to thee, a silver penny——"

"Not a farthing," quoth he, "I go upon a long journey and wouldst thou that I find myself supperless for want of the silver thou namest?" Faith, I be that poor myself that even the crows would find poor picking."

"Where goest thou?" broke in the second monk.

"To seek service under a most gracious master," replied Red Tom, "and perchance if thou comest unto Friedrichsstadt——"

"Then thou art not of them who serve the King? Wherefore goest thou to them who be against him?"

"'Tis a matter that concerns thee little," growled Red Tom shaking his bridle rein, "Am I then a school boy that I be stopped by every traveler who doth meet me on the public highway? Get thee then unto the

inn of Master Schwerin, there be that in thee that savorest of the beggar."

Thereupon he would have urged his horse forward, but the larger of the monks broke into a merry chuckle, and throwing back the cowl from his head, exposed the laughing features of Major Kratz, and at once Red Tom perceived that the other was the King. While he stared in much perplexity, doubting whether to go down upon his knees on the highway, or to treat the matter as it best deserved, His Majesty broke into a laugh also and clapped his companion heartily upon the shoulder.

"Faith!" said he, "thou art fit meat for the devil, thou fiery Englishman, seeing that thou didst treat with so little respect them who serve faithfully Mother Church. 'Twas little we thought to meet thee, thou who wouldst not serve the King."

Then was Red Tom much perplexed, for he knew not whether the King be joking or in earnest, but the latter understanding the situation laughed the louder, and drawing from under his cloak a leathern pouch containing some twenty gold pieces, proffered it to Red Tom, saying:

"Thou art indeed no longer poor, and when thou again meetest a holy friar who doth perchance ask of thee alms, thou wilt be better able to give something unto him."

Then Red Tom, too, entered into the spirit of the matter, and the King being clad but as a monk, with dust upon his person, he did boldly pluck from his breeches' pocket the bag of silver pieces that I had given him, and taking therefrom a penny did hold it toward His Majesty.

"I do indeed now remember," said he solemnly, "that a certain friend of mine gave to me a sum of money to be used in the King's service, and by my faith it be no disloyalty to give of that, which should go for the upholding of the honor of the King, to so worthy and holy a man as thou."

The King replying nothing, so great was his astonishment at the other's boldness, Red Tom continued:

"Therefore take this penny, most worthy friar, and when thou comest once again unto thine abbey, say, I pray thee, five hundred aves and——"

The King held up his hand, remembering his dignity, and wishing the matter to go no further, so that Red Tom perceiving the joke was at an end, dismounted and stood uncovered on the highway.

"Thou art indeed a worthy fellow!" cried the King. We have often heard that those of your country went straight unto the core of the matter. Go thou then unto our cousin of Friedrichsstadt and we warrant thee

thou wilt there give a good account of thyself ; what sayst thou, Major Kratz? ”

“That he indeed seems a soldier of much discretion, though perchance exceeding bold, replied the Major, “Surely if in England it be the custom that meeting with royalty—”

“Faith !” cried the King, “there be a place for everything, and who in Schleswig, thinkst thou, meeting the King on his own highway, wouldst thus enter into the spirit of so goodly a jest? Yet it striketh our fancy, forsooth, for it showeth a stout heart, and there be much need of such throughout our kingdom.”

Having thus spoken, the King left with Red Tom the pouch containing the gold pieces, and drawing the cowl over his head once more, he proceeded on his way toward the city. I afterward learned from Major Kratz that they had spent the night at the abbey, whence His Majesty had gone to consult with the worthy Abbot concerning certain matters, and, fearing the Duke would get wind of the affair, had chosen to return to the palace disguised in such manner as Red Tom had taken reckoning of. As to the latter, he had remained standing beside his horse until the King was well on his way, when, having safely disposed of the money, he once more bestrode his

saddle and pushed on toward the dukedom of Friedrichsstadt.

The castle of the Duke, laying some half score leagues from the gates of Schleswig, it was late in the afternoon when my countryman first sighted its towers, as he rode to the summit of a hill situate amid the forest that surrounded it on all sides, and of which the largest part in Schleswig lay in the Wolf's domain.

"S'blood!" quoth the rider pulling up his horse that he might the better take reckoning of that which was before him, "'tis a country of little profit for honest soldiery, seeing that there be naught but wood everywhere, and fit only for the concealing of such enemies as fight not in an open field. Methinks 'twas an evil day that brought me hither."

The blast of a horn interrupted this soliloquy, and presently from out the shadow of the forest dashed five horsemen preceded by as many hounds, who, seeing the solitary soldier set up so fierce a yelping that Red Tom made haste to put hand to sword hilt. As to the riders, they checked their steeds on the instant, and he who rode in advance uttered a fierce oath.

"Zounds," cried he, "what meanest so sudden a checking of this goodly company on the Duke's own land? Who art thou,

fellow, that comest 'twixt me and such sport as I take pleasure in? Wherefore art thou here?"

"Faith!" good Sir," replied Red Tom, for he took the speaker to be none other than the Duke himself, "'tis little to my liking, forsooth, that I have thus lost my way in the heart of so great a forest; yet be it fitting that thou, being evidently a person of much authority, come to an understanding concerning that which brought me hither. I seek the lord of yon great castle."

"Ach!" cried the Duke looking hard upon him, "thou hast indeed a ready tongue, and it be well for thee that thou didst answer so clearly. These are most troublous times, when every man may be perchance a rogue, an' hadst thou hesitated, or forsooth shown thyself to be cast into confusion, my lance would have put a speedy ending to thy trickery. But wherefore seekest thou the Duke of Friedrichsstadt?"

"To serve him," replied Red Tom bluntly, "being but a stranger in Schleswig, having journeyed hither with only my good sword and steed for company, I did inquire in what manner an humble soldier, who having fought in ten campaigns, might gain that wherein lay much honor and perchance some profit."

"And what learned thou?" asked the Duke.

"That there be indeed but one master in all Schleswig whose leadership would do honor to my experience," replied Red Tom glibly, "and he be this same lord of Friedrichsstadt."

"Donnerwetter!" roared the Duke turning to his followers, "'tis a goodly answer, and the fellow pleaseth me, but," looking the other straight in the eye, "be there not a king in Schleswig?"

"Forsooth," replied Red Tom, "'tis so reported, and at the outset I did methink 'twere profitable to draw sword in his service."

"And what then?" growled the Duke.

"Faith," said Red Tom, "'twere afore I saw him riding through the streets of his capital; a boy, forsooth, with fair cheeks and an eye of excessive mildness. S'blood, said I, 'tis not for children thou art seeking, Friend Thomas, but a true man who knowth a good blade from a lady's bodkin. If there be none such in Schleswig, I return to mine own country."

The Duke laughed heartily. "Zounds!" cried he, "thou dost give my cousin a most ill-savored reputation yet thou be'st a man of much perception. Thou art, methinks, an Englishman?"

"There be those among the French and some perchance in Flanders and even in Germany who would answer thee," replied Red Tom proudly.

"Of the companies?"

"Even so, yet have I fought under many great generals, both in France, against the Dons in Spain and with those of the Low Countries——"

"Enough!" cried the Duke, "knowest thou any who dwell in Schleswig?"

"But illy," replied Red Tom, "there be indeed one, a countryman and another, a certain boastful fellow, with whom I have drunk and supped. It was, in truth, one of these who, when I despaired me of finding employment to my liking, didst recommend that I seek the Duke of Friedrichsstadt who, it is said be more fitting to fill the throne than a certain smooth-faced monarch concerning whom I will say nothing."

A murmur of approbation arose from among the Duke's followers and even he, so crafty a knave, was over pleased at such plain speaking. For 'twas thus the wily soldier reckoned, that, the Duke having many spies in Schleswig, it would reach his ears that he who claimed to be a stranger to the country, had been seen in our company.

"Thou art indeed a worthy fellow,"

cried the Duke, his black eyes sparkling and the white of his teeth showing through the sable beard, "forsooth thou hast chosen wisely. Knowst thou that in him who speaks to thee thou seest the Lord of Friedrichsstadt?"

Methinks that in turning soldier, Red Tom deprived the school of English players of a most worthy disciple. So well feigned was his surprise, and joyous his manner that he stood in the presence of the Duke himself, the other was wholly deceived, and did then and there take into his service one whom, had he known the truth, he would have struck dead with the hunting spear he held in his hand. Yet 'tis ever thus. The most cunning do oftentimes fall into a snare, for Fate, having set its seal upon a matter, be it great or small, doth turn neither to the right nor left despite all the plans and plots in Christendom.

CHAPTER XI

HOW AN UNSEEMLY QUARREL ENDED IN A SWORD CUT.

The Castle of Friedrichsstadt, a structure of ancient workmanship, rose grim and foreboding above the giant oaks amid which the first Duke of that house had chosen to erect his stronghold. Like all the feudal dwellings of that period the castle was a fortress of no mean strength, consisting of donjon, courtyard and keep, the whole surrounded by a deep moat, flanked by massive towers and turrets rising above the summit of the battlement.

A score of straggling outbuildings, for the accomodation of the Duke's followers, stood close under the grey-stone walls of the main structure, for the better security of which, an arched barbican rose to the height of some twenty feet above the bed rock upon which the castle was founded. Nor was there in all Schleswig a structure better fitted for defence in those troublous times, when each man's house was indeed a fortress, and it brooked ill for them who slept not behind thick stone walls, with closed port-cullis and uplifted drawbridge.

It was within this stronghold of Friedrichsstadt that Red Tom found himself on the third day following that when he had met the Duke in the forest, and of two things had he taken special note. One, that the master of the castle was indeed most cunning, having gathered about him men of all nations, who were, in truth, most thorough rogues, to whom the cutting of a throat or a knife thrust in the back, mattered as little as the laying open of a venison pasty. Secondly, that he who called himself the Duke's brother was indeed a man of some valor, yet cowardly withal, and more given to secret intrigues and plotting, than to open and honorable contest. This same Sir Karl, surnamed "the Black," because of his dark complexion, was exceeding susceptible to flattery, wherein lay his greatest weakness, and upon which string Red Tom being indeed a crafty fellow resolved within himself to play the loudest.

The Lord of Friedrichsstadt had made practice to attach to his person a picked body guard of twoscore chosen men, those who were most ready with their swords, and to whom danger of life, or limb, was nothing. And, being much taken with the address of my countryman, recognizing in him a soldier of no mean ability, it had pleased the Duke to appoint him to this

selfsame company of rogues. Therefore, it was, that on the evening of the third day after his entrance into the service of the Wolf, Red Tom, together with those who served the Duke most closely, found himself seated in the midst of these forty knaves in the great mess chamber of the castle.

Being of several nationalities, and the wine, of which there was a goodly quantity, having circulated freely, there were those of the company whose valor got the better of their brains, and who, being exceeding jealous of the Duke's favor, looked with no friendly eye upon the newcomer, nor yet upon their companions in roguery. Therefore, the meal being finished, and the conversation waxing exceeding rough, there arose in his place a hulking German man-at-arms who with huge pewter mug in hand, did assail with a torrent of abusive oaths those who differed from him on some trivial matter, concerning an incident that had occurred at the storming of a certain fortress on the Flemish border.

"Zounds," cried he, waving that which he held in his hand above his head, "who beside I was present at the onslaught wherein I saw five of my countrymen beat down and overpower half a score of bastard French defenders?"

"Un dizaine!" shrieked a Frenchman who sat at his elbow. "Une dizaine, Finissez, vous dis-je, tu tete de veau."

The German would have replied, but ere the words left his lips a roguish fellow in the rear interposed his foot betwixt the other's shanks, so that he went down, the contents of the mug drenching the fiery Frenchman in a shower of foaming spray.

Then followed a tumult the like of which Red Tom had never heard, for with the shouts of merriment from the company, the muffled oaths of the fallen boaster, and the louder shrieks of the angry Frenchman, the messroom was turned into a veritable pandemonium.

"Pardieu!" roared he of France, "'c'est abominable, je ne me possede pas de colere, cela est—"

"Tush!" growled a veteran checking his laughter, "cease thy bellowing lest the matter reach him who will take stern reckoning of thee; what matters—"

"Enough!" cried the German gathering himself together and towering over his smaller adversary. "Die Warze, dost think to trip me so easily?" Thou art indeed a coward, a babbler a—"

"Une verrue?" yelled the Frenchman, "Une sanglier art thou, with so much running."

"Running! saith thou," retorted the other, "wherefore—"

"At the great oak, une ecrevisse!" shrieked the Frenchman forgetting all prudence, so great was his wrath, "before one man armed with a—"

"Donnerwetter!" roared the German, "one man indeed, were there not ten, a dozen, an army."

"Silence! Art thou then mad," cried the veteran man-at-arms thrusting his napkin across the other's mouth; were the Duke to hear—"

The warning checked the tumult, for 'twas well known among them, that their master visited severe punishment upon any so bold as to discuss his plots in public. Being thus turned from his purpose, the German sought another outlet for his temper, and his eyes chanced to fall upon Red Tom. "Ach!" he cried, "'tis thou then who doth laugh so loudly. Donnerwetter, yet will I have it out with thee."

Glad to turn the quarrel aside so easily, those who sat near the speaker applauded mildly, which all the more encouraged the hulking fellow.

"Hearest thou me?" he bawled, "thou rogue of England, be thou so tongue-tied that thy speech faileth thee?"

"Nay," replied Red Tom gently, "had

I forsooth a voice like thine, in truth might I become a braggart also."

"Well sped, thy arrow hath indeed hit the mark," cried a voice from the further end of the table.

"Braggart! sayst thou?" roared the German shaking his fist in Red Tom's face, "thou bearded knave I will twist thy nose for thee."

"S'blood!" replied Red Tom softly, his color deepening, "even perchance as I do thine." And reaching across the table he laid hold of the other's nasal organ, grasping it so tightly between his thumb and finger that straightway the fool's eyes ran like a waterfall.

This act, so unexpected, yet so quickly accomplished, was greeted first with stares of astonishment, then with roars of laughter from the entire company.

"Die Rechnung! Die Rechnung!" cried a dozen voices, "he hath well paid thee for thine insult!"

"Ach! Die Rechnung well rendered!" roared a voice above the tumult, "Thou wert ever a brawler Herr Giller, and well hast thou met thy match; wouldst draw thy sword in thine own honor?"

On the instant the hall became as silent as my father's cellar, for 'twas the Duke, who having entered unobserved, and witnessed

the German's attack on Red Tom, thus made known his presence.

"Much have I heard concerning thee," continued he, looking the fellow straight in the eyes, "and it hath come to mine ears that thou art indeed much given to boasting; now, perchance, there be a time to try thy mettle; what sayst thou, Sir Englishman?"

"Faith!" replied Red Tom eyeing his adversary, "the quarrel was little of my seeking, seeing 'twere more fitting the Company stand together. Yet hath he offered unto me insult and my sword is ever ready to carry on such argument."

"And thou?" asked the Duke turning to the other.

Now, methinks the fellow judged it were an easy matter, for, indeed, he being almost a giant there seemed in Red Tom little to be feared, were the pair matched against each other. My countryman was some three inches shorter than the German, and more sparely put together, though, forsooth, he was of robust build, with muscles of steel and great breadth of shoulder.

"Were it fitting to deprive thy Grace of even one of the meanest of thy followers," replied the giant slowly, "I have here three feet of steel —"

"Lies the wind there?" cried the Duke,

"then is the matter settled. There be space in the courtyard below and thither will I go to meet thee."

'Twas thus, indeed, that the Duke of Friedrichsstadt settled such serious quarrels as arose among his followers for the loss of one man, or of ten for that matter, he reckoned on not at all. Moreover, methinks, he had in mind to test the mettle of him who had ridden unto his castle from Schleswig, having resolved not to serve the King.

The Company hastened to the courtyard, a place of goodly extent, the ground being covered with great stone tiles, well lighted by a score of torches in the hands of as many of the Duke's servants, he presently appeared among them and with him his brother, Sir Karl, that he might witness the game of sword play.

In preparation thereof, the German had cast off his upper garments exposing a hairy chest of great breadth and proportions. As for Red Tom, although advised by some of them to do likewise, he elected to fight as he was, in boots, shirt and leather jacket.

The Company having gathered in a circle about the place chosen for the combat, the Duke commanded the fighters to lay no heavily, nor to spare in any wise each

others' person. Each, then, having drawn his sword, eyed his adversary as though seeking to read the backbone of his resolution.

Suddenly the blade of the German darted forward as though he had resolved by one fierce thrust to end the matter, yet ere the point half reached his body, Red Tom sprang lightly backward, sweeping the line of steel aside with one dash of his sword, whereupon the other nearly lost his footing, so that a great shout arose from the Company.

Now they went sternly at it, the ringing of the steel filling the courtyard, and the blades flashing gallantly in the light of the torches. But although the German pressed Red Tom now on one side, now on the other, cutting and thrusting with all his great strength, methinks he could as easily have reached the topmost branch of the tallest oak in the forest of Friedrichsstadt, as the person of his adversary.

Into Red Tom's eyes there presently came a smile for, he told me afterward, that a dozen times, had he so minded, he could have thrust his sword through the other's body.

Perchance, some inkling of the truth had come into the giant's understanding, for, changing his mode of attack, he made bold

to close in upon his enemy. Red Tom, noting his purpose, sprang suddenly aside and meeting the other's blade upon his hilt, turned the steel with such dispatch that the German's guard was broken. Then, ere the Duke, or any among his followers, could note his purpose, with one great sweep of his sword he met the other's body where the hand joins the wrist, so that the former yet clutching the hilt of its owner's weapon, was severed from the arm and fell with a ring of steel to the pavement. Having thus rendered his enemy unfit for further service, yet sparing his life, Red Tom made way for those who ran to the assistance of their comrade.

"Faith!" cried the Duke, turning to his brother, "thou hast seen some sturdy sword play, both in Schleswig and elsewhere, yet never, I warrant, hast thou witnessed a stroke more cunningly delivered."

"'Twas in truth a most lusty blow," replied Sir Karl, "and methinks such swords be few in Schleswig."

As to the Company, some there were who looked darkly upon the victor, seeing that the Duke praised him so openly. Yet there were many who crowded about him in all friendliness, that he had rid them so handily of such a boasting braggart.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW A BRIDGE OF PLANKS BECAME THE DEVIL'S ADVERSARY.

Having thus gained the favor of the Lord of Friedrichsstadt, and established his prowess in arms, Red Tom remained for yet the space of five days within the castle; but, during that time there came to his ears nothing whereby he could serve the King; neither discovered he anything concerning the plots which the Duke was laying. But on the sixth day there came that about which well-nigh brought a violent ending to his errand.

It being somewhat early in the evening, and the moonlight exceeding pleasant in the woodland about the castle, Red Tom, through favor of the Duke obtained permission whereby he could walk abroad beyond the gates, the drawbridge being yet down, for the hour had not arrived when the port-cullis of the fortress was lowered.

Passing through the gate, clad as he was in his harness, and bearing the insignia of the Duke upon his shoulder, he turned his

steps along the road which led through the forest and beyond that, even to the walls of Schleswig. There was that in his mind which troubled him greatly; a foreboding as though of evil; neither was he content with himself that he had discovered nothing whereby he could better further the interest of the King.

At a place some half league distant from the castle there ran a deep creek, which, crossing the road at the foot of a hill was spanned by a narrow bridge of planks, the more stable structure which had formerly marked the spot having been swept away by a torrent some six weeks before. The planks which formed this crossing were but poorly put together, it being the purpose of the master of Friedrichsstadt to repair the same in a more fitting manner when opportunity afforded.

Having reached the border of the creek Red Tom turned about, intending to go back to the castle, when, the night being very still, there fell upon his ear the clatter of horse's feet upon the road in the direction of the capital. Stepping under the shadow of the trees he awaited the coming of the horseman, being careful that his sword lay loosely in its scabbard.

He who came from Schleswig seemed in great haste, for, reaching the summit of

the hill which lay beyond the creek, he checked not at all the speed of his animal, but plying the spurs more fiercely, thundered in reckless gallop straight down the steep declivity upon the narrow crossing of uneven planks.

There be times when the master of evil doth seem to undo himself with plotting, neglecting, perchance, certain trivial matters wherein may lie that which is of much import for the further success of his undertaking, and so, methinks, it was in this seemingly unimportant matter—to wit, the riding of him who came from Schleswig down a steep hill in the forest of Friedrichsstadt.

Having passed safely as far as the bridge itself, the horse did suddenly swerve a little, whereby one of those planks which lay but loosely on the girders being unbalanced, intercepted itself 'twixt the steed's legs and man and beast came to the earth with a crash that set the echoes ringing. So quickly done was it that Red Tom, scarce forty paces away, had not yet lost his vision of the desperate rider bolting down the hill, ere the horse lay dead, its neck being broken, and the man huddled together in a shapeless heap beside the highway, filling the forest with his shrieks of agony.

"S'blood!" muttered Red Tom, stepping quickly to the other's side, "methinks the followers of the Wolf depart in such a manner that presently there be few remaining. What, comrade, be thou hurt so badly?"

"Gott!" cried the man faintly, "wast for this I rode so quickly?" then, attempting to rise, "Thou hast come in good time, comrade; methinks my hip be broken."

"Tut!" said Red Tom bending nearer that he might note the other's face more clearly, "thy fall doth yet set heavily upon thee; if thy bones be broken—"

"'Tis even so," gasped the wounded man, "and my message to the Duke unspoken."

"He did expect thee," replied Red Tom shortly, "and, in truth, that something might be learned concerning thee, was I sent hither. Had I met thee sooner—"

Now had the man been less wounded, or his senses clearer, methinks he would not have parted so easily with that which had sent him in such speed from the King's capital to the Master of Friedrichsstadt. But being in great pain, and he who confronted him to all appearances an honest fellow, wearing the insignia of the Duke upon his person, he made haste to relate his errand.

"Thou hast indeed come in good time,"

said he, "for 'twere of much import that our master receive that which I bear as quickly as possible. Hasten then to the castle with a letter thou wilt find in my pocket; 'tis from Herr Friedel, who even now awaiteth an answer, and the time is very precious. When thou hast delivered the message into the Duke's hand, hasten also, I pray thee, to send hither those who will convey me to the castle, for to move, in truth, fills me with tongues of fire."

"Faith!" cried Red Tom, "that will I do most gladly," and he drew from an inner pocket of the other's jacket a small packet tied about with a breadth of red ribbon. Yet, perceiving it taken from him, the wounded man repented of his purpose, crying out aloud that the letter be straight way returned to him.

"Nay, comrade," replied Red Tom, "thy mishap hath taken away thy senses. Said not thou that Friend Friedel awaited a speedy answer?"

"Yet," cried the other, "I know thee not; there be indeed a traitor come to Friedrichsstadt and—"

"A traitor!" roared Red Tom, "a traitor, sayst thou? 'Tis of much import then that thy words reach the Duke speedily, that he may act quickly, as befitteth the occasion."

"Ach!" muttered the messenger, "'tis even so, I—" but being overcome with the pain and indeed it was death that drew near to him the words died in his throat, and he fell into a swoon.

Here, then, was a matter of exceeding seriousness. That his coming to Friedrichsstadt as a spy was known to some among the Duke's followers, Red Tom well comprehended. Moreover, he held in his hand a letter sent to the Wolf from Schleswig, bearing doubtless upon a matter that touched him closely. Being a man of much resource, there came into his mind what he should do.

Descending to the bed of the creek he dipped therein his cap of steel and returning to him who lay dying, set about to restore his senses. When the man had again opened his eyes, Red Tom knelt by his side, that he might the better catch the answer which he desired. And straightway questioned him concerning that of which he had spoken.

Then the dying man, remembering naught but his allegiance to the Duke, for he had indeed been long in his service, also, perchance, because he felt the end was near, did reply faintly:

"There is in truth a certain spy now in the castle; an Englishman, who, being seen

much at a tavern in Schleswig, to which went frequently the King's officers, did suddenly depart and hath entered the service of our master."

"S'blood!" quoth Red Tom gently, tho' his fingers toyed idly with his sword hilt, "how knowst thou this thing?"

"'Twas no easy matter," replied the messenger between his groans, "and there be none beside me who hath taken note of this same crafty business; yet being skilled in that which pertaineth to secrecy, 'twas but yesterday that all became clear to me."

"And thou didst tell no one?" asked Red Tom, gruffly, for on the answer depended much.

"And why, forsooth?" replied the other, "knowst thou not that the Duke rewards—"

Suddenly he cried out loudly, for the moon, peeping at that moment above the tops of the trees, did with its light reveal clearly the features of him who bore the Duke's insignia, and the more, that Red Tom had not replaced the cap upon his head.

"'Tis thou!" cried the man, endeavoring to raise himself from the ground, while his hand went out for the pistol in his belt. "'Tis thou; for thy—"

As he cried thus there came a rush of

blood to his lips, his fingers clutched wildly at his breast, and as Red Tom would have caught him in his arms, he rolled upon his face, all life gone.

"Faith!" muttered Red Tom, lifting his eyes upward that he might see the moon, "Thou hast both betrayed and saved me, perchance, from doing that which would have brought some regret. 'Twas but a thread that kept the knave abreathing, and thy good office hath caused its snapping suddenly; yet would I seek thy favor further."

So saying he made haste to undo the packet, within which lay a closely-written letter, intended only for the eye of the Wolf of Friedrichsstadt. Being but poorly versed in the learning of the day, Red Tom was hard put to it concerning the contents of the message, but by dint of much labor, mingled with certain round English oaths and wrinkling of brow, he at length came to the substance of the matter, which, having stored in his mind, caused him to chuckle softly. Finishing his task he did with exceeding care tie the packet as he had found it, and thrusting it beneath his breastplate, hastened with all speed to the castle.

The hour being late, and the gates long shut, some minutes elapsed ere the captain

of the watch, summoned from his supper, did speak with him from the battlement, and recognizing in him one of the Duke's followers, let down the drawbridge that he might enter. Red Tom, being then again within the castle sent word unto the Wolf that he bore a message of much import.

Having read the letter, the Wolf questioned the other closely, nor until he had sent a company of soldiers to the spot where lay the dead messenger, to take note of his condition, and who reported that there was found no wounds upon him, caused by dagger, sword or bullet, did he dismiss his suspicions of the matter.

Finding that his servant had indeed come to his death as related by Red Tom, the Lord of Friedrichsstadt summoned one of his officers and directed that he straightway gather together a company of twenty men, the best swordsmen in the castle, and have all in readiness for a certain undertaking. As to Red Tom, there was delivered to him a second letter, with strict injunctions to set out at once for Schleswig, that Herr Friedel might the same night receive his answer.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW THE PRINCESS ALICE SPOKE CONCERNING CERTAIN MATTERS.

It was well known throughout Schleswig that the Princess Alice loved no man, except, indeed, the King, her brother. She was very proud, and though many wooed, none had touched her heart. Her beauty was so great, her station so high, that of noble suitors there had been no lack, even from among the princes of France, Germany, and the nearer country of Denmark. It was the coldness of the Princess which sent home in a rage the eldest son of the ruler of the Danes. And he, being much put out concerning the matter, considering that in the person of the Prince the whole nation of Denmark had met with grievous insult, meditated much upon a war with his southern neighbor. But the wisdom of certain statesmen, both in Denmark and Schleswig prevailed, so that the King withheld his wrath and no bloodshed followed. Upon another occasion there came unto Schleswig a certain prince of Germany, a well-spoken man, of much re-

noun in warlike matters, and, forsooth, a fitting consort for the Princess. The King, her father, moreover considered it with much favor, as of great benefit to his house, so that he did welcome the German most cordially, yet to no end; for, having laid his heart at the Princess's feet, he received in return little which he sought. Thereupon he betook him again to his own country, and casting aside his princely dignity, forswore the world, exchanging his castle for a narrow cell, his good sword for a monk's rosary. Then did Rupert the Second fall into a great rage, and summoned his daughter before him; yet the Princess made such fitting answers to his arguments that the matter straightway ended. From that time he considered no more to whom he might marry her, knowing full well that if there were no love in her heart for another, persuasion would be useless.

There was much wonder, in truth, throughout the kingdom that among those who came to the capital the Princess could find none to her liking. Some called her cruel; others said that she loved in secret one below her station, but all agreed that he who won her would be most fortunate. This I had from Major Kratz, also from the idle gossip which took place beneath my window, in Master Schwerin's garden.

Having seen the Princess, I marveled not that many suitors came to Schleswig, and perchance I dreamed such dreams as made my thoughts of England less clear, and my desire to remain in Schleswig more strong upon me.

The third day from that on which Red Tom had departed for the country of the Wolf, there came unto the inn a messenger from the palace, bearing an order that I was straightway to accompany him thither. Thinking 'twas the King who summoned me, I made ready quickly, careful that nothing lacked in my attire. It was early in the evening when I came to the palace, and into a great room, ablaze with many lights, where were assembled some half a score of women, each intent upon amusement. In this place my conductor left me standing with hat in hand and mind disturbed, for I had thought to come among men only. My embarrassment was scarcely lessened when the room grew still, all eyes being turned upon me as though inquiring my purpose. Not wishing to be outdone in so trivial a matter, I returned their stares in kind, so that the maidens drew themselves up haughtily.

While we stood thus, there entered the room a woman, who approached with great deference, and made known that her royal

mistress would receive me in her own apartment. At that the interest of those who stood about awakened anew as I, much amazed at such an ending to the matter, followed her who bore the message of the Princess.

Passing through several rooms my guide paused at last beside a heavy curtain, which, drawing aside, she bade me precede her. Advancing, my head in a whirl, I came upon a room much smaller than the others, and at a window which overlooked the garden of the palace, sat the daughter of the House of Schleswig.

Perceiving me, the Princess made known that I approach, smiling as I bent over the hand she held out to me.

"Thou art indeed come, Sir Englishman," said she, half haughtily; "hast thou then so soon forgotten thy service to the King, my brother?"

"Madame," I replied, "'tis an honor—"

"Ah!" cried she, impatiently, "thou art indeed a man."

Seeing in my eyes amazement at her words, she laughed. "Because thou also wouldst flatter me. Is there a man in all the world—"

"Nay, madame," said I, "if he but see thee."

Her cheeks reddened, yet my words

pleased her, for what woman loveth not a well turned compliment.

For a time she said nothing, sitting with her eyes fixed upon the royal arms engraved upon a ring she wore; then suddenly turning:

"Hast thou seen the King?"

"Aye, madame," I replied, "he did indeed do me great honor."

"And thy comrades?"

"We be even now in his service," I replied.

"His?" said she, raising her eyes to mine.

"Thine, madame," I replied quickly; "yet in serving thee do we not serve the King also?"

"True," said she, "yet hath his Majesty his own followers." Having said which she fell again to studying the ring.

"Madame," said I, "thou didst send for me, perchance—"

She raised her eyes quickly, looking at me fixedly.

"I would speak to thee concerning thine own country," said she softly, "for indeed came not the first true Englishman from Schleswig?"

"I know not concerning that, madame," I replied, "for indeed England is very old."

"Then will I teach thee," said she quickly, but checked herself, a flush o'erspreading her brow.

"Nay," said she, tapping her foot impatiently upon the carpet, "yet thou shouldst know that long ago those who conquered Britain set sail from Schleswig, and perchance—"

"What, madame?" said I, softly.

"Thy name is Martant," replied she. "Is thy house of the nobility?"

Here then could I answer her frankly, for, as I have said, there were none throughout the whole of England who could boast of more renown than they who bore the name of Merguille.

"Thou art indeed a princess," said I, "and thy father was a king yet, my father's house be very old, the founder thereof being the Grand Duke of Merguille, the same who was a kinsman to William Fitz-Osborn, a trusted follower of him men call the Conqueror."

"Then, indeed," cried she, "thy race is noble, and, forsooth, thy father very near the throne of England."

"Nay, madame," I replied, "my father is a quiet country gentleman, who, having gained some renown in war, hath withdrawn to his estates that he may end his days—"

"Whilst his son doth seek honor in foreign countries," she broke in quickly. "Yet methinks, were he to so desire, the court of Queen Elizabeth would be much graced with his presence."

To this I answered nothing, for, in truth, it was not clear to me whether she spake of Sir Charles, or of him who had fled from England like a common criminal.

"Methinks I have heard," she continued, "there be many women in thy country whose beauty is known throughout all Europe."

"As to that," I replied, "there be indeed some who have much beauty."

"And thy Queen? Is she not very beautiful?"

"Elizabeth is old," said I, "yet have I heard my father say that in her prime she was indeed the flower of English womanhood."

"And, Sir Englishman," asked she demurely, "is there no one among all the maids of England whose beauty doth touch thee deeply?"

Then, forsooth, did I hesitate; for how, standing in her presence, drinking in her loveliness, could I answer the question frankly? Yet I dissembled but little, for in truth there was then but one face in my heart, and 'twas that of her who thus

spoke. A man is but a man, and the charm of woman exceeding great; moreover, the eyes of the Princess were fixed upon me.

"Madame," said I, "there are indeed certain maidens of my acquaintance whose faces do live in my memory; and there is one who standeth somewhat above the rest; yet are our houses so divided that—"

She checked me by a sudden gesture. "'Twas not for that I summoned thee," said she impatiently, "yet would I know something concerning thee, for the King hath told me that henceforth I am to have a body guard."

"His Majesty did indeed do us that honor," I began.

She smiled scornfully. "'Tis thou whom I have chosen for that office; yet indeed I need no man's protection, either now, or afterward."

"Madame," I replied haughtily, "it was represented to my companions and to me that the Princess of Schleswig wished us to serve her. If, however, I have misunderstood the matter, there be little need that an English gentleman—"

She looked at me sharply, the hot blood surging to her face.

"Thou hast, indeed, rendered me great service," said she, "and if my words have wounded thee—"

"It is my wish to serve thee further," replied I; "yet would I not thrust my presence upon thee, being, as I said, a gentleman."

Now methinks that never in the course of her life had any man so spoken unto the Princess Alice; yet being deeply wounded at her words and of hasty temper, I said that which first came into my mind, for, in truth, in what manner was I beholden to the House of Schleswig? Had she turned from me, or commanded her attendant to conduct me from her presence, I would indeed have gone without regret, though afterward perhaps have thought much upon the matter.

Thus having spoken I awaited the Princess's pleasure, resolving in my anger I would straightway go unto the King, request that he summon Red Tom from the country of the Wolf, so that we might depart from his kingdom even as we had come unto it. The Princess, being of quick perception, did seem to read what was passing in my mind, for she arose from her seat and crossing over to me touched lightly with her finger the hilt of my sword, saying softly:

"Sir Englishman, thy temper is as quick to leap forth as this blade of steel in a

just cause. Will it suffice if I tell thee I spoke but hastily?"

Upon the instant was my anger gone, and stooping, I kissed the hand which lay so near. The Princess smiled and raised her eyes to mine, causing my heart to beat right merrily. Whether she heard it, or, being a woman, comprehended the matter, I know not, but her eyes were lowered and the red rose in her hair shone not more crimson than the blush upon her cheek. As the smile faded from her lips she drew back, saying half seriously:

"Wherefore, Sir Englishman, do we so speak together; is it then the custom of your country that gentlemen do lose their temper at a quick spoken word?"

Being much ashamed that I had in truth forgotten my position, I replied nothing, whereupon she laughed that I was overcome so easily.

"Come," said she, "are we then children that we do break so quickly into quarrelling? Yet, thou being a man, and all men much alike, it is scarce to be wondered at."

And to my mind she thus proved herself the woman.

"In truth, madame," said I, "the thing is somewhat to be wondered at; yet, in your opinion is there not one man in the

whole world in whom lies little selfishness?"

"Indeed, sir," she replied, "I know not, having never yet found one; but thou, being a man, couldst perchance advise me in so delicate a matter."

"Or better, show thee," thought I, shaking my head by way of answer.

Having thus conversed the better part of an hour, the Princess suddenly remembered that for which she had summoned me, and it was this. Being fond of riding in the forest, beyond the walls of the city, and the King unwilling, as formerly, that she go alone, it had been decided that each day someone, who could be trusted with so great an office, should accompany her.

"Therefore, sir," said she, nodding her head gravely, "if indeed thine anger against me be quite cooled, I would that each morning at the hour of nine thou comest to the palace, that I ride forth in safety and the King's mind be not troubled."

'Twas thus I became the Princess's body-guard. Having thanked her for so great an honor conferred upon me, at which she laughed softly, I took my leave, and having gone from the palace sought my chamber at the inn, that being alone, I might think upon the good fortune which had befallen me.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THERE CAME TO SCHLESWIG A SHIP FROM ENGLAND.

Obedient to the command of the Princess, I presented myself at the palace on the following morning, booted and spurred for the occasion. Yet was she more a princess and less of the woman than upon those previous times when I had been in her company. Whether she regretted that her speech had been so freely given, or remembering that she was indeed the King's sister, and I only an English gentleman, I know not; yet to the smile of friendliness with which she greeted me, was added a certain coldness, a royal dignity, which barred the way to conversation, and made me more the subject and less the companion to the lady, than was to my liking.

Each morning, at the same hour, I presented myself for her convenience, and for the space of three hours we rode forth into the forest, seldom meeting anyone save certain woodmen, and such common folk who dwelt in the country beyond the walls of the city. To all, the Princess spoke

pleasantly; to some gave silver pieces, and once, coming upon an aged crone staggering under a bundle of fagots, she drew up her horse, questioned the woman concerning her condition, and left in her withered palm a gold piece, whereupon the ancient dame fell upon her knees, calling down the blessing of God upon the royal House of Schleswig. Yet to me the Princess was wondrous cold, speaking but briefly and that, concerning the condition of the weather, the roughness of the road, or the beauty of the forest through which we passed. Once, coming to the bank of a river which rippled over its bed of pebbles, she asked if in England there were any streams of great beauty, and whether, indeed, it was the custom for the women of that country to ride much abroad.

Upon the third day, as we were riding homeward and emerged suddenly from the shelter of the trees, we found confronting us the great oak. My companion turned her head aside and I saw the hand that held her bridle tighten and she shuddered. Glancing to the spot where the fringe of the forest met the meadow, I perceived a fresh mound of earth, from which the wind had blown the leaves, whereupon I reckoned what was in the Princess's mind.

Early in the afternoon of the fourth

day, having gone some three leagues from the gate of the city, riding along a wide bridle path which swept in a great circle through the forest, there fell upon my ear the clatter of hoofs behind us. Falling back of the Princess I made sure that my pistols were in readiness, the place being lonely and the enemies of the King exceeding bold. The beating of the hoofs grew louder and soon there appeared, riding at a gallop, a tall man, mounted on a grey horse. Having gained upon us he turned quickly aside, passing to the right and continued on his way; yet I saw that he looked hard at the Princess from under the shadow of his bristling brows. When he was gone and the silence of the forest again unbroken, I debated in my mind the import of the matter, so trivial, yet perchance of much meaning. The man might be a stranger in Schleswig, and knowing not the Princess had gazed at her in admiration, not saluting her in passing. Yet, on the other hand, what did a stranger in the forest, and upon a path which led only from the gate of the city for a distance of ten miles through the woodland, when, being a circle, it met again the main highway which led into the capital? Therefore I spoke out boldly to the Princess:

“Madame,” said I, “methinks ’twere

wise that we hasten our return to the palace, for the hour is somewhat late, and perchance a storm be brewing."

She raised her eyes quickly toward the blue sky which shone through the tree-tops.

"Sir," said she, "there are no clouds anywhere; yet, as thou sayest, 'twere best we hasten forward. In Schleswig the storm breaks suddenly."

Then felt I shame that I had shown her my fears, yet was I surprised that she had answered so meekly. Having set our horses to the gallop we came 'ere long unto the main highway, and presently the gate of the city. When we reached the palace I stood aside, that the Princess might enter; yet she tarried for a moment holding out her hand to me, and raising my eyes I saw her lips tremble as though she would have spoken, but she uttered not a word.

Having attended to the welfare of my horse, and there remaining still some hours of daylight, I resolved to walk upon the quays, where, perchance, I might find something of interest in the shipping. Passing, therefore, into the eastern section of the city, I came upon a scene of great activity for there lay in the harbor some twoscore vessels, many loaded with that merchandise which would presently be transferred

to the large warehouses of which I have before spoken. There were also sailors and merchants of every nation of the north, of the Netherlands, France and England, with a scattering of dark-skinned southerners, among whom I noted negroes from the coast of Africa and the trading countries of the East.

But these held not my interest so much as the sight of a goodly English merchantman, which, having arrived early in the afternoon, lay two cables' length from the pier upon which I stood. As, unmindful of that which was passing around me, I strained my eyes to catch a better view of those who stood upon her deck, a boat put out from the vessel and pulled with sturdy English strokes toward the city. At that my heart grew heavy, for the boat and those who manned her would return, and the good ship weighing anchor would set sail for England, where dwelt my father and one other who was very dear to me. Presently the boat drew near the land, and he who was seated in the stern raised his eyes. Seeing me he started up quickly, shading his brow with his hand and staring as one bereft of reason. Looking at him more closely as the boat swept under the shadow of the pier, my heart suddenly bounded fiercely, for, as he raised his

face, I looked once more upon my father's brother, Sir Henry Martant, the same whose early teachings had filled my brain with longings for adventure.

Then, indeed, I forgot straightway that I stood an outcast, a man without a country, and hastening down the steps which led to the landing place, waited with trembling for my uncle's greeting. He, old soldier that he was, came forward like a schoolboy, holding out both hands and gazing at me with amazement.

"Faith!" cried he, having looked me carefully over, "'tis in truth the lad, grown into a man. Come, thou runaway, what doest thou thus in Schleswig?"

"Ah!" I cried, "and thou hast come to me, but Sir Charles, my father—"

"Most grievously put out that thou didst leave the nest so hastily," replied he. "Methinks he hath been twenty times to London, and to Dover, and even unto Liverpool, to say nothing of some score of other English seaports, thinking, forsooth, to learn something concerning thee."

"Then," said I, "my father hath forgiven—"

"Forgiven? Zounds, man, and wherefore? Because a true Catholic and an English gentleman did uphold the honor of the House

of Merguille? And wherefore wouldst thou need forgiveness?"

"Yet the Queen?" said I.

"Faith," he replied, "Her Majesty was passing well when last I saw her at Windsor; yet, being now somewhat old, she doth—"

"But that for which I left England?"

Sir Henry looked upon the ground. "Methinks there be some slight matter of which I have heard," said he. "Something concerning the killing of a jackdaw who flew too nigh the nest of a certain hawk. Yet, as in truth, I made plain to Sir Charles, there be certain youthful follies of which he comprehended something, having within my memory, killed in fair fight one who, forsooth, let fall some slight innuendo concerning a lady of the House of Merguille."

"Then," cried I, "my father hath forgiven me?"

"Aye, lad, though he hath been in much danger, being thy father," he replied more soberly. "He is a Martant and thou shouldst have trusted him; in this lies thy greatest fault. But come, there is perchance some spot in Schleswig where thou lodgest, and indeed I have much to say to thee. Little did I think that in so strange a place should I find thee. Methought the

Americas were more likely, for thou and that rogue, Red Thomas, were ever planning foolishness. Be he in Schleswig?"

"That he is," replied I, "and as I, in the service of the King, yet of that will I tell thee presently."

"Good!" said he, "then go thou quickly and I will follow thee."

So, having spoken to the boatmen that they return to the ship without him, he fell in beside me, and together we set out for the inn of Master Schwerin.

Having, therefore, conducted Sir Henry in safety to my chamber, I closed the door, placed before him a flask of wine and set myself down at the table. Looking carefully about the apartment he nodded gravely, chuckling softly to himself the meanwhile.

"Faith!" said he, "thou hast indeed lit upon a likely place, Sir Runaway, and I perceive that thou hast looked well unto thy comfort. I remember when a lad of thine age, having resolved, as thou, upon adventure, I was content, finding myself in a strange country, to sleep at the poorest inn, my name being, indeed, longer than my purse. Yet here I sit, with thy wine before me, a good roof over head, and the King's arms looking from beneath as likely a bed as is to be found in all the

north country." Having said this he pointed to the saddle which, after taking from the horse ridden by the Princess's attendant, I had thrust beneath my couch that none might see it.

"Therefore," continued Sir Henry, "tell me, I pray thee, something of that which hath befallen thee. Despite my fifty years, there yet remaineth a love of adventurous tales, and certain am I that thou canst ease my curiosity."

Having thus delivered himself, he poured out a glass of wine, tasted it gingerly, and tapped his forehead knowingly.

"A most excellent vintage!" quoth he, finishing that he had begun, "is there then much more in Schleswig? I be of a mind to bear a cargo back to England. But now to thy tale, lad."

Being thus questioned, and overjoyed that I had found so good an opportunity, I straightway related to him that which had befallen me, commencing with the time when I met the Queen's messenger, and ending with my ride through the forest with the Princess Alice.

Having heard me to the end, Sir Henry chuckled once again, and smote upon the table with his palm.

"By the crown of England," cried he;

"forsooth, we have been taken in most neatly; for, while we remained at home, our minds much troubled concerning thee, through fear that thou hadst fallen into dire adversity, thou hast found a new country and a new king, with a pretty princess thrown into the measure. Would that thy father could hear thy tale, for even now, I warrant, he be making much diligent inquiry after thee."

"I have indeed been most fortunate," I replied, "yet have I longed to see England and though the Princess is very beautiful, there is another."

Sir Henry looked at me searchingly.

"Lad," said he, "doth thine heart still lie in the keeping of Mistress Caldwalder?"

"'Twas for her I did that which drove me hither," I replied shortly.

"Then," said Sir Henry, "there be that which perforce I must tell thee speedily, and thou being now a man wilt meet it as well befitteth thee; in truth, the lady be little worthy of thy sorrow."

"Of whom speakest thou?" said I.

"Of whom but Edith Caldwalder," replied he; "of her for whom thou wert forced to fly England, having turned against thee the wrath of the proudest queen in Christendom."

"Well," said I, "'twere best to reach

the matter quickly." Yet fearing what he might say, there was a sudden sinking of my heart, for certain black doubts had sprung up within me.

CHAPTER XV.

HOW A MAID SOLD HER HEART FOR A BAG OF GOLD.

Having, therefore, poured out for my uncle a second glass of wine, I awaited with vague apprehension that which he had to disclose to me, perforce of duty, as he claimed.

"'Tis some seven weeks," said he, "that there has been much talk throughout the south country concerning an alliance between the House of Caldwalder and a certain Earl much in the favor of England's Queen."

"Yet there be two daughters," I interrupted.

"Tut!" said Sir Henry, "to that I shall come presently. Now, the house of which I speak, being very old, yet, by reason of the times being exceeding poor, it is plain to be seen that the riches of this Earl would do away with certain grave embarrassments, most galling to so proud a personage as the father of these maidens. Having, therefore, this in mind, he encouraged the attentions of the nobleman, think-

ing, forsooth, that the fellow had set himself to win the hand of the eldest daughter, who was a lady of some beauty and of exceeding strength of mind. The Earl, being much taken with his love-making, be-thought himself that a visit to the manor-house would scarce be to his disadvantage; so, with certain followers, taken from the Court, he appeared one morning at the door of the fair one's bower.

It chanced that there was in his mind no thought concerning the eldest daughter of the house, it being his desire to obtain the hand of her more beautiful sister. Yet of this the father suspected nothing, having, forsooth, selected a husband for the damsel. And, to render the thing more difficult, the maid herself had set her heart upon a young man of the neighborhood, and common gossip had joined their names.

There accompanied the Earl unto the manorhouse a certain flower of the Court, a great dandy and a fellow much in the good graces of Elizabeth: indeed, by whom she had sent a letter to the master of the house, urging, under pretext of the royal favor, the union of the Earl with his daughter. This messenger, being much in favor with women, straightway set about to play the gallant unto Mistress Caldwalder, thinking, perchance, that she, bidding fair

to become a lady of some importance through her marriage with the Earl, would, if he could gain her good will, further his plans in certain directions. The maid, also, being flattered by the advances of so marvelous a gentleman, did encourage his attentions, and the night being most fitting for soft words and phrases, she consented to accompany him about the ground. Yet was their stroll rudely interrupted, for, suddenly there came upon them the one whom the maiden had favored, and the matter ended with the gallant being thrust through the body; in what manner, perchance, thou canst best understand."

"Then," cried I, "'tis the Lady Edith of whom thou speakest?"

"Faith!" said Sir Henry, "thou hast reckoned rightly; but there be something still to follow of which thou yet knowest nothing.

"On the morning following, the absence of the gallant being noted, the maid having held her peace concerning his killing, a search was set afoot, which ended in his being found beside a pathway in the park, with a goodly swordthrust through the lungs. Then, in truth, there was great commotion, and Mistress Caldwell was summoned that she might tell what she knew concerning so grave a matter. Yet she put

them off until evening, remaining in her room on the plea of sickness.

"When, however, it became noised abroad that two men living in the neighborhood, had taken themselves suddenly away; that certain persons dwelling near the highway had been awakened by the galloping of horses, together with the information given by half a score of young men who frequented the public tavern, suspicion grew into certainty, and Mistress Caldwell being hard pressed by her father and those who sought to learn concerning the killing, made known her part in the matter.

Then, indeed, was a messenger dispatched with all haste to London, and a company of soldiers put upon the track of those who had fled. The wrath of the Queen was very great; that a countryman, and a Catholic to boot, had so slain one of her gallants, it being contended that the murderer had, forsooth, used desperate measures, else would have the sword thrust been very different.

"But Mistress Caldwell?" said I.

"As to her," replied Sir Henry, "between the wrath of the Queen, the sternness of her father, and the importunings of the Earl, she was hard put to it. Having remained true to her lover for the space

of ten days, threatened meanwhile with the most dire displeasure of her monarch, and it being pointed out to her that, in truth, the man could no more show face in England, she fell to thinking on the matter, and her meditations ended with but little credit to her womanhood."

"Then," said I, "the lady's vows were clean forgotten?"

"'Twas even so," replied Sir Henry.

Straightway there came into my heart a great sorrow; the idol being rudely shattered, little joy was left me. Yet with the pain arose a pride which, in truth, contended for the mastery. That I should be a dupe, an idle plaything to be cast aside for a bag of gold, aroused my spirit."

Sir Henry, noting the struggle and surmising that which contended within me, said nothing, till my manhood giving away beneath the sorrow, I turned aside that he might not see the moisture in my eyes.

Then did he lay his hand in all kindness on my shoulder and spoke as best befitted the occasion.

"Lad," said he, "there be something more than women in this world, though few, perchance, who have thus reckoned. Certain men have lost their wits for a fair face and many have erred, toiled, or even perished for the sake of a woman's smile.

“Love is indeed like unto a dream, very sweet, and exceeding fair to think upon; but the awakening is as rude as the breaking of the cold gray dawn of a cheerless day, when the remembrance of the charmer’s voice be mockery. Therefore, if having given her word to thee, with much softness, I warrant, and perchance shedding of tears, then straightway broken it as suited a woman’s whim, thou hast indeed escaped a great calamity; for what happiness could, forsooth, have come to thee? I am older than thou by thirty years, and it hath ever been my experience that a woman faithless in a few things, smiling where there’s no joy, weeping when there’s no sorrow, will be untrue in many, deceiving them that trust in her, and betraying them that come within her power. Yet, through it all, she doth make haste to maintain her righteousness, uttering vows that be no sooner made than broken.”

“I do not hold that there be no true women in the world, for of some I know, and these, forsooth, make but slight display of their good qualities. Yet there be more whose falseness outruns their fairness, either through evil intent or perchance weakness of spirit and a comprehension of no great ability which in the end be much the same. Now, I warrant

me, had Edith Caldwalder been of such calibre as would grace the House of Merguille, this Earl would have been sent straightway about his business, and the maid have remained true to thee though she waited twenty years. I say, moreover, that if she hath, indeed, any love in her heart for Hal Martant, it will some time rise against her, when thou, having clear forgotten her, care little for the happiness of one who hath so basely attempted thy undoing. Therefore it were best that thou put from thee all thought of her, and if perchance there come another, some gentle, kindly maid, whom thou perceivest doth love thee and beareth thine image in her heart, then wilt thou be most fortunate. And, as I have told thee, there be some true women in the world. Turn thy mind to that which is in the present, being as thou art in service to the King of Schleswig and greatly honored, though yet a youth in experience."

Having heard and considered well the wisdom of his words, in which indeed lay much truth, there came to me a firm resolve that being a man whose pride would stand against such vain regrets as might perchance arise, and Mistress Cadwalder having so lightly foregone her words, I

would indeed turn from all thoughts of her.

Sir Henry, reading my purpose, smiled grimly, and I remembered to have heard that in his youth a woman had been false to him, whence had sprung his desire for adventure.

This for the time ending our conversation, it seemed fitting that he, being a stranger to Schleswig, should see something of the capital, and suggesting the same he consented readily; the more so, methinks, hoping that my mind might be turned to more profitable thoughts than dreaming.

Therefore, looking to our attire, we descended from the chamber, greeting Master Schwerin, whom we passed, and turned our steps toward the great market place of the city.

"Thou hast in truth come unto a goodly country," said my uncle, looking about him upon the great piles of masonry and the white towers of the royal palace. "There be many small kingdoms in Europe, but I know of none which surpasseth this Schleswig. It was for this reason when my friend, the captain of yon vessel, with whom I sailed on my second voyage to America, made known to me he was to take a cargo to this port, pressing me with earnestness

that I accompany him, I decided to journey forth once more from England."


"'Twas fate," said I, "that brought thee hither."

"As to that," replied Sir Henry, "I know nothing of it, being but a poor believer in omens, witchcraft and the like. Yet having come to Schleswig, and there being a likelihood of serious business, as thou sayest, here I remain for a season; for old though I may be, there is yet that within me which responds to the sound of a trumpet or the clash of arms in conflict."

"There is like to be something stirring," I replied, "but here comes one who, if I judge not wrongly, will tell thee much concerning the matter," and I pointed to Captain Von Francius, who with head in air, and sword point dangling betwixt his heels, came sauntering slowly in our direction.

"And who indeed be yon vain fellow who struts so haughtily?" inquired my companion. "Surely it be the King, or perchance the general of—"

"Zounds!" cried I, laughing, "the King, indeed. 'Tis no other than the same Von Francius of whom I have told thee; yet the man be not vain as thou thinkest. Of that thou shalt judge presently."



As I spoke the Captain turned his eyes from contemplating the housetops, and, catching sight of us, halted across the way.

"Ach!" cried he, "thou hast then returned? For these seven hours have I been companionless, except thou judgest a dozen rogues of the Company, and a scattering of bawling women be fit comrades for a man of my peaceful temperament. But whom have we here? A soldier, I warrant me, for there be that about him that savoreth of sword cuts, and—"

"Faith!" said I, laughing, "thou hast indeed been hard put to it; yet am I glad that thou hast appeared so handily. Here is my father's brother, Sir Henry Martant, who hath but just arrived from England."

The Captain bowed low. "'Tis indeed a great honor," quoth he, "for the fame of Sir Henry Martant hath not remained shut in a closet. Right glad am I to thus meet your lordship, having in the late war served under thy brother, Sir Charles, whom I trust thou hast left both well and thriving."

During this speech, delivered in the Captain's most gallant manner, there came into Sir Henry's eyes a smile; for, despite the other's high manner, he recognized the hardy soldier.

"And I," said he, holding out his hand, "am honored also, that upon my coming unto Schleswig thou dost greet me so heartily; indeed, I have heard much concerning the leader of a certain company, well known for his prowess during the late French war. Moreover, am I much beholden to thee, likewise Sir Charles, that thou didst serve so graciously one of the house of Merguille, with whom adverse circumstances dealt most shabbily."

"Zounds!" cried the Captain, pleased that a knight of England lay under some obligation to him. "'Twas but one's duty to a comrade; yet being in Schleswig, thou wilt perceive that this young gentleman hath received much honor, being even now in the service of the royal Princess."

"And for that would I also thank thee," replied my uncle, "when thou comest to England—"

But fearing lest they would continue their exchange of compliments till darkness overtook us, I suggested that, as the hour was late, we return to the inn, when Master Schwerin would set before us that which his house afforded.

Thereupon, having turned us about, the pair walked side by side, the Captain speaking much concerning the state of the kingdom, and Sir Henry plying him with

questions, so that I, forsooth, spoke not a word. In this manner we came again to my chamber, where the landlord straightway waited upon us, thinking his house greatly honored that so renowned an Englishman should eat beneath its roof. For the Captain, not to let pass so golden an opportunity, had whispered in his kinsman's ear that Sir Henry was a boon companion to the famous Drake, having indeed fought by his side and received for his prowess in America much honor from his Queen. The news getting about the city, many there were who came unto the inn, so that both the landlord's pocket and reputation were much benefited by my uncle's presence.

Having eaten, the two set to it once more, each seeking to outdo the other in his conversation, and relating such tales of wonderful adventure that the very Greeks themselves were but children in the matter. Thus the time passed quickly and it grew exceeding late, so that I was weary and fell into a doze. For three hours longer did they speak together, disturbing with their fervor my slumber, for indeed neither reckoned on anything about him. Presently I was awakened by a clattering upon the stairs and a shaking of the door. Springing up I perceived Von Francius, sword in hand, standing on the threshold,

while confronting him, with dress soiled and dust-stained, appeared the flushed visage of Red Tom.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE WOLF'S MESSENGER CAME TO SCHLESWIG.

For a moment the Captain said nothing, so great was his astonishment, while Red Tom, catching sight of Sir Henry, moved not from the doorway, regarding him with a fixed and incredulous gaze.

"S'blood!" said he softly, "be I awake or dreaming? Be this Schleswig or England?"

Sir Henry caught not the words, but noting the hesitation of my comrade stepped quickly forward that he might greet him.

"Faith!" cried he, 'art thou then so dumb-founded at sight of a familiar visage? 'Twere not thus in England."

"Methought," said Red Tom stepping in the room, "that the devil played sad havoc with my reason, seeing thee thus in Schleswig. Yet if Sir Charles doth demand an accounting——"

Sir Henry laughed. "Tut man," cried he, "thinkest 'twas thou who slew the jumping jack? I warrant me 'twas Master Hal, here, who led thee on this reckless

venture, wherefore lay blame against thyself-concerning it?"

Now Red Tom, honest fellow that he was, had it in his mind that 'twas indeed he at whose door lay the blame for so sudden a departure from my father's house. Therefore the sight of Sir Henry had taken him aback, in that he had expected, in place of friendly greeting, a storm of words wherein would be vented the anger of the house of Merguille.

"S'blood!" said he removing the steel cap from his head, "thou hast heard then—"

"Faith!" that I have, "laughed Sir Henry, being much tickled at the other's doleful countenance. "Thou art indeed a crafty rogue, deserving of cord and gibbet for having carried off this gentle youth upon so perilous an undertaking."

Red Tom ran his fingers through his beard, "'Twill come soon enough," said he, "for my master be very strict with them who serve him not loyally."

"Zounds!" cried Von Francius, "has thy errand then failed so quickly? The King—"

Red Tom burst out laughing. "I serve the Duke of Friedrichsstadt," said he, "'tis on his errand I am come to Schleswig, and presently return unto the castle."

Thereupon he told us that which had befallen him.

"Then thou art, in truth, come to Schleswig to plot against the King," quoth Von Francius, his grey eyes twinkling. "It cometh to my mind that I hand thee over to an officer who will take good care that thou goest no more to Friedrichsstadt."

"S'blood!" muttered Red Tom, "'twere better service to the King that thou seek out a certain man in Schleswig, with whom I have much pressing business. His name be Friedel and——"

"Friedel, sayst thou?" cried Von Francius, "there be but one Friedel at the the capital and he is the King's officer!"

"As to that," replied Red Tom, "I know nothing, having never seen the man, but there came to Friedrichsstadt a certain messenger (whose soul be now in hell) who bore upon his person a letter from Herr Friedel to my master, wherein was something said concerning the King's sister."

"Come!" cried I, "what riddle speakest thou?"

"Faith!" replied Red Tom, "I be indeed no scholar, therefore, perchance something of the letter escaped me; the more so that the moon shone not too brightly. Yet do I remember that it spoke concerning a certain pathway in the forest whereon rode the Princess and with her a single gentleman, and none beside."

"Zounds!" cried Von Francius, "'tis then a plot! What sayst thou?"

"My memory doth also tell me," replied Red Tom, "that it be thought an easy matter to waylay this Princess, and having slain him who rode with her, carry her to Friedrichsstadt, where, forsooth, the King will find—"

"Ach!" roared the Captain "a pretty tale thou bringest us! But what of this Herr Friedel?"

"'Twas he who planned the thing," replied Red Tom simply, "and 'tis to him I bear a message from the Duke, that twenty good men will be waiting in the forest at that hour when the Princess rides beyond the walls."

Von Francius smiled grimly. "Faith!" said he, "methinks there be a goodly ending to this matter, and perchance a hanging! Said I not mes enfants d'enfer be ever ready?"

"Thou meanest?" cried I.

"That there be sixty beside the twenty!" roared the Captain, "and if so many as one man returneth unto Friedrichsstadt, will I turn a fruit vender!"

Then I perceived his meaning; the soldiers of the Duke coming to the forest would find there awaiting them threescore goodly blades whose business was to settle

matters in no mild fashion. To this plan Sir Henry lent himself, resolving to accompany the Captain that he might not miss so joyous an adventure.

Presently, Red Tom aroused himself.

"Faith!" said he, "the hour grows late, and Herr Friedel awaiteth me, therefore must I hasten."

"Softly!" cried the Captain, "but tarry for yet an hour that there be one less rogue in Schleswig." Whereupon he made haste to straighten his attire.

"Where goest thou?" I asked.

"To Major Kratz," said he, "that when my comrade comes unto this traitor, there be certain ones behind the curtains who note carefully his treachery."

Sir Henry chuckled. "Thou shouldst be an Englishman," said he, "thou followest closely the custom of Elizabeth."

"I know not," replied the Captain, "yet methinks 'tis a goodly habit. Thou wilt see a hanging on the morrow."

"Then, this Herr Friedel be a traitor?"

"Aye!" replied Von Francius, "a captain of the King's household. If such men be traitors, where in Schleswig is there any safety for his Majesty?"

"'Tis well known at Friedrichsstadt," broke in Red Tom, "that the Duke doth count much upon him, and it cometh to

my mind that if the King be cast from his throne, and the Duke obtain the crown, this same Herr Friedel will lose nothing."

To that the Captain smiled grimly, for he feared little that reward would reach the traitor, and having bidden Red Tom to tarry with us for an hour he left.

Having come to the house where dwelt the Major, he aroused that officer who, being awakened at so unseemly an hour, appeared with nightcap and pistol at the window of his chamber. Perceiving by whom he was summoned, he made haste to unbar the door, speaking no word until the other had quite finished with his story. But as the Captain said, there was that in his face which boded ill for him who would betray the King.

Dressing with all haste he bid the Captain follow him, and coming to the palace had fierce contention with the Lord High Chamberlain concerning the awakening of the King, the hour being very early in the morning.

Yet 'twas the King who put an ending to the matter, for, hearing the voice of Major Kratz, he appeared before them, demanding what had brought the other to the palace at such an hour. Then was the Chamberlain much disquieted, fearing the displeasure of his Majesty, who had been disturbed so

rudely and come forth appareled only in a silken dressing gown. But the King, perceiving the business was exceeding grave, commanded that the Major and Von Francius enter quickly his apartment, when, having closed the door, he questioned them concerning their errand.

Hearing the Captain's tale, his face grew pale, perchance with anger, or through fear that there were indeed none but traitors in the palace, yet did he come to a decision speedily, for, summoning the Chamberlain he bid him dress him quickly, when, having caught up a sword, commanded the officers to follow him.

As to Red Tom, having remained with us for the space of an hour, he went also to the palace that he might deliver the Duke's message to the traitor. And, indeed, he found him easily for, expecting an answer from his master, the Captain of the guards had ordered were anyone to inquire concerning him, he should be shown at once to his apartments, that they might be alone.

Coming, therefore, into the presence of Herr Friedel, Red Tom was seized with doubt about this being the same who had turned against the King.

He had thought to find a man of gallant bearing, a youth, perchance, whose ambition had turned his heart against the

throne. But in Herr Friedel he perceived a man of threescore years, with kindly features, and a mildness of eye which did not indicate deceit or dangerous diplomacy. Yet he bowed humbly, saying that 'twere the Captain of the King's guard whom he sought, having certain weighty business with him. The other smiled and bade him sit, saying that he must, in truth, be weary, having ridden with all haste from Friedrichsstadt. With his own hand he set before him wine and biscuit, bidding him first eat and drink, that he might be better able to speak regarding that for which he had come to Schleswig.

"S'blood!" thought Red Tom, crumbling the bread upon his palm. "This be, forsooth, a most kindly personage, and an ill subject for a hanging. Yet if he be a traitor, having had some experience, being old, his sin doth look all the blacker."

"Come!" said Herr Friedel, "thou eatest nothing, therefore make haste to tell me why thou hast come hither."

Red Tom, therefore, being convinced that 'twas the Duke's servant who thus addressed him, delivered unto his hands the letter wherein lay certain instructions for the further undoing of the House of Schleswig.

"Thou art in truth a trusty fellow," said

Herr Friedel, having read carefully the message, "and thou wilt be well rewarded when our master cometh to his own. Yet much caution is necessary that nothing reach the ears of those who be against us."

With these words he turned to light a taper that he might burn the letter, when there came a violent knocking upon the door and a voice demanded admittance in the King's name. The traitor well knowing the importance and danger of the letter, it being found upon him, would have destroyed it quickly, had not Red Tom snatched it from his hand, so there might be forthcoming strong proof against him.

Now Herr Friedel was much skilled in the art of dissembling, so that, seeing the letter in the other's hand, there came into his eyes a gleam of craftiness.

"Faith!" cried he loudly, "thou art a rogue and a traitor to the King, make way therefore that I unbar the door."

Understanding not the other's purport, Red Tom drew back, laying his hand upon his sword, for he thought, in truth, that perchance some danger threatened. But Herr Friedel with all speed unbarred the door, bidding those who stood without to enter quickly. Then appeared the King, and behind him Major Kratz, with Captain

Von Francius and a dozen of the royal officers.

With them was the Lord High Bailiff of the kingdom, who, coming close unto the traitor, commanded that he deliver himself up, being an enemy unto the State of Schleswig.

A sudden pallor crossed the other's face, yet he did reply boldly:

"And who, Sir Bailiff, makes this charge against me?"

"His Majesty doth so direct it," replied the Bailiff, "and here be proof against thee." And with that he took the letter from Red Tom and gave it to the King.

Then did Herr Friedel play most boldly and with much ingenuity.

"Sire," quoth he, turning to the King, "this be, in truth, a letter from the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, yet of its contents I know nothing."

"Knave!" cried the King, "thou liest—"

"Faith!" went on Herr Friedel calmly, "'tis indeed a matter of grave suspicion, yet easily explained. Being close unto the King, a safeguard to his royal person, this Duke of Friedrichsstadt hath planned most cunningly to overcome me and hath sent a letter which being found in my apartment would raise against me a black suspicion. Suspecting nothing of this have I

admitted to my presence yon crafty hireling who—”

“Enough!” cried the King, “thy treachery be blacker that thou dost seek to hang a comrade. Perchance we know nothing concerning the twenty soldiers sent out this night from Friedrichsstadt.”

At that the traitor’s knees shook under him and perceiving the King knew all, he fell upon them beseeching his life be spared that he might serve the House of Schleswig in all faithfulness.

To this his Majesty made no reply but commanded that the man be bound, and so, no longer by his cunning, endanger the public safety. Nor would he spare him in any way, for he was very wroth and considered that an example was needed to show the Duke’s followers there was indeed a king in Schleswig. What followed was known throughout the capital, for at daybreak, time having been given him to make preparation for his soul’s departure, Herr Friedel was hanged in the courtyard of the King’s prison, and thus suddenly ended his crafty plotting.

As for Red Tom, having received the thanks of the King, he straightway set forth for the castle of Friedrichsstadt. So madly did he ride, and so well told his tale, that the Duke suspected nothing,

thinking, forsooth, ere he reached Schleswig, Herr Friedel had been taken, and that Red Tom but narrowly escaped falling among his enemies.

Great indeed was his wrath against the King, for he perceived most clearly that he must work more openly, his secret cunning having gained him nothing. Having so resolved there went that same day certain horsemen from the castle, who bore messages throughout the kingdom to them who followed him, and thus the Wolf began his game more boldly.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW THE CAPTAIN'S CHILDREN HUNTED IN THE FOREST.

Had the messenger who rode in such haste from Schleswig to the castle of Friedrichsstadt, noted the condition of the bridge of planks which brought a speedy ending to his errand, or had the Wolf, fearing every man might be a traitor, thrown Red Tom straightway into chains instead of sending him to Schleswig, methinks Hal Martant would scarce have served the Princess further, and perchance the King have lost his throne. For had we ridden forth that morning, as was our custom, there had been dire adversity to the House of Schleswig, its choicest flower being carried off a captive.

But Master Friedel having been brought to punishment Captain Von Francius made haste to lay before the King that other matter of which Red Tom had spoken. Then was his Majesty greatly troubled, and he paced in silence and deep thought his chamber, seeking for some way whereby to better guard the Princess, yet, 'twas in his

mind to bring together those soldiers in whom he trusted, and marching without delay against his enemies, to risk his fortune in an open warfare.

Being then in much perplexity he summoned certain of his counselors, that the matter might be laid before them when, having spoken with much clearness, he desired their opinion. Then stood up one who had served the King, his father, and replied unto His Majesty, that without doubt war must indeed come, he knew, yet recognizing the temper of the people, and knowing full well the cunning of the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, he feared greatly so sudden a kindling of the fire. Could the Duke be drawn from his stronghold and forced to fight more openly, having indeed begun the business, there was in his mind small doubt as to the ending of the matter. But were the King to march against the other, thereby bringing about a war, the Duke would gain much benefit.

Hearing a murmur of approval from the company the King frowned darkly, sarcastically demanding that someone suggest a plan whereby the Duke be forced from his position. No one answered this, but he who had first spoken replied, that to his mind the thing of greatest import at the moment was that the royal Princess

be better guarded. He considered that neither the palace nor any spot in Schleswig, for that matter, was a place of sufficient security for her safety.

"Then," cried the King, striking his hand upon the table, "there is only heaven! wouldst thou send her thither?"

"Nay," replied the other calmly, "yet there is a haven nigh unto it; the Abbey of Brenheim. Methinks that even this Duke of Friedrichsstadt would scarce extend his schemes in that direction."

"Faith!" cried the King, "thou speakest wisely, thither will we take her speedily, for, as thou sayest, the place being holy, it standeth next to heaven."

So saying he dismissed the council, summoning before him Major Kratz and Captain Von Francius that he might make known to them what had been decided concerning the better safety of the Princess. Moreover, that she might not be alone with the monks and churchmen to protect her, it was his royal pleasure that there accompany her to the abbey, beside her women, Hal Martant and a certain courtier, a good swordsman, and a gentleman of famous wit and conversation. It was his purpose also, that we set out for the abbey that afternoon, being accompanied thither by a regiment of soldiers, that there come no

danger by the way. In truth, would he have kept the troopers with us, but that were an ill matter, the abbey being a sanctuary and a place of peace.

Having thus spoken, his Majesty questioned Captain Von Francius closely as to that which Red Tom had told him concerning the purpose of the Duke's soldiers to form an ambush in the forest. He replied briefly, giving the substance of the matter, and adding that 'twould be a simple undertaking to give those who sought the Princess a rude welcome.

"Faith!" replied the King, "it be our mind also, and to that end we will send a company of soldiers to welcome them, that my cousin complains not that we do his followers no honor."

Then Von Francius with boldness besought the King to grant a favor unto him.

"Ten!" cried Rupert, "or more without number! Already we are much thy debtor. Wilt thou have gold or—"

"Sire!" replied the Captain proudly, "'tis that free permission be given to deal with those who come from Friedrichsstadt as best pleaseth me."

The King arched his eyebrows. "Zounds!" cried he, "thou dost ask much, yet if thou choose to lead our soldiers we will so command it."

"There be certain comrades," replied Von Francius, "who—"

"Faith!" laughed the King, "would three then, contend against the twenty? Methinks with all thy valor we should lose thee quickly."

"Not three, but sixty," replied the Captain proudly "mes enfants d'enfer—"

"Thy children, cried the King, "are they not disbanded?"

"Nay, sire," replied the other, "there yet remain threescore rogues who followed me. Some indeed be peaceful tradesmen, some few be in thy service, and—"

The King laughed softly, for, in truth, he understood the matter, remembering something of so famous a company. In the days when his Majesty was but a lad and his father sat upon the throne, the fame of the Captain's children had gone throughout Europe; wild tales of les enfants d'enfer and the boldness of their undertakings. 'Twas thus that the King knew something of the valor of the Company, yet he had thought that few remained, nor remembered clearly that this captain was the same Von Francius who had commanded that famous band of veterans. Thinking perchance to see if time had changed their bravery he consented gladly to that which

the Captain desired, fearing not that the Duke's followers would escape them easily.

"But," said he, "there is one condition to thy undertaking, which methinks, will scarce sit heavily upon thy conscience."

"And that?" asked Von Francius.

"Faith!" replied the King, "that thou spare none who come from Friedrichsstadt, whether they perish by the sword, or thou dost hang them to the nearest tree, we care not, but let none return unto our cousin."

The Captain looked grave, for he fancied little so bloody a vengeance, considering that the servants of the Duke were countrymen and did but obey their master. The King noting his hesitation, turned to Major Kratz and asked that he speak his mind concerning the matter; whether it seemed fitting that so evil a company remain in Schleswig. For it was indeed in the King's mind that by some such means the Wolf would be drawn from his stronghold.

The Major being loyal to the throne and hating the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, replied that those who served a traitor deserved no mercy, the more so, that they came not as soldiers, but as thieves and outlaws, seeking to carry off a woman. Then, Captain Von Francius drew back no longer, but promised the King that, God willing, not one of those who came from Friedrichsstadt should re-

turn to report their failure to their master. As to the outcome of the matter I got it from my father's brother who accompanied the Captain on his errand.

In the King's forest, close unto the bridle path of which I have spoken, there was an open space of some extent, from whence arose a gently sloping hill bordering upon a place surrounded by a marsh full of dangerous sand and quagmires. 'Twas to this there came about the hour of noon the Duke's followers, having ridden with all speed from Friedrichsstadt so that both men and steeds were weary.

Having dismounted, the officer in charge, considering that 'twould scarce need twenty men to take a woman, directed that four rogues station themselves in the forest some fifty paces down the bridle path, and two others beyond the ending of the glade. The remainder, with the horses, encamped beside the hill, their harness unbuckled, and their arms strewn carelessly upon the ground; for, indeed, they feared no danger, nor noted that behind the shelter of the hill lay concealed certain soldiers who wore the King's insignia.

Thus came the servants of the Wolf into a trap of their own choosing, for were any to attack them from the front, there was no escape except through the forest, they

being hemmed in on one side by the marsh, on the other by the hill.

Captain Von Francius learning the situation of those whom he sought, had divided the Company, blocking the path in either direction with a score of men, so that none escape easily. The remainder following a way which led unto the hill, came suddenly upon the soldiers of the Duke, taking them unawares, and being outnumbered two to one, they were quickly cut down and slain without mercy. Yet one man fled to the marsh, and concealing himself among the rushes lay hidden until nightfall, when, none except the dead remaining, he hastened to the castle, and through him the Wolf learned of the destruction of his followers.

Captain Von Francius spoke but little of it afterward, though many questioned him, for indeed he held it small honor that sixty men had slain twenty, although the King had so commanded.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW AN EVIL THING BEFEL AT BRENHEIM ABBEY.

Of that which happened at the Abbey of Brenheim in the first year of the King's reign I have never since liked to speak. I am no churchman, and vows which, perchance, sit heavily upon certain of my fellows, together with penance and much praying, fasting and the like, trouble me little, being a soldier, yet withal a Catholic, and not given to certain backslidings common throughout Europe. Nor does the killing of a man trouble me overmuch, indeed it being no great matter. But that a holy abbey intended for prayer and meditation, not for brawls and bloodshed, should by my hand have become a place of execution is not so light a thing. Although the worthy Abbot himself hath absolved of such blame as might lie upon me, and a golden candlestick in the great cathedral of Schleswig beareth witness that I gave freely for the easing of my conscience, there remaineth in my mind grave doubts as to the matter being quite

forgiven. But the King commanding, I write, that all may know concerning the blackness of the House of Friedrichsstadt, and perchance, I also receive due honor from those who have since come up in Schleswig, though, as to that there may be else, forsooth, to recommend me.

The event of which I speak was much talked of at the time, spreading swiftly through the kingdom, and from it came much advantage to the King, causing to spring up in the hearts of the people a bitter enmity against the House of Friedrichsstadt, being held that it cared naught for holy things or places. Major Kratz insisted that the hand of Fate had brought about the matter, for, said he, the slaying of half his army would scarce have checked the ambition of the Wolf so suddenly as did the reckless wickedness of his brother.

It was somewhat early in the evening of the tenth day of the Princess's sojourn at the Abbey, that I had retired to my chamber with an illness brought about by over indulgence in pigeon pie. According to the King's desire, and through the kindness of the worthy Abbot, there had been assigned to our party a quarter of the great building apart from the more common dwelling of its inmates. To reach the apartments of the Princess it was necessary to

pass the door of my chamber, which opened into the arched hall leading to the walls of the building most distant from the great gate of the Abbey. Nor could anyone go near these rooms unless he first passed the chapel where stood the silver altar, and the great wooden cross, brought to Schleswig, as rumor had it, from the Mount of Calvary.

Perchance it had been in the King's mind that did anyone so brave the wrath of Mother Church as to come with base design unto the Abbey, pass the gate and enter the chapel, the shadow of the cross barring the way unto the Princess, would turn him from his evil purpose. Yet the King, nor people, reckoned little the baseness of the House of Friedrichsstadt.

The Abbot of Brenheim had been a soldier in his youth, and despite present sanctity there clung to him certain worldly habits, such as love of good cheer and company, with flagon and merry jest. On the evening of which I speak, having sat with him at table, we discussed many subjects not taught by Holy Writ, beside certain savory viands not to be despised by so excellent a brace of trenchmen. In this way came about the pigeon pie, highly praised by the good father, but the result of which was grievous unto me.

As said I had retired early, falling into a troubled sleep, in which were intermingled fantastic dreams and the chanting of the monks within the chapel. It might have been four hours later, perhaps more, I can not tell, when I was awakened by the sound of a voice and violent knocking at my door. Springing up quickly, and donning scant attire, I snatched my sword from the table and stepped out into the hall. There stood the first lady-in-waiting to the Princess, clad only in her night robe, and so filled with terror that she seemed not aware of her condition. As I looked at her in much perplexity, wondering if this be some mad freak, there came the sound of sandled feet along the passage, and the worthy Abbot appeared, his cowl thrown back, and a great staff in his hand. Behind him trooped a score of holy brethren huddled close together as though terror-stricken by some sudden and unlooked for calamity.

Seeing no cause for so strange a gathering, nor that those godly men should leave their cells so hurriedly, there came into my mind a dread suspicion that the good Abbot had indulged too long at table, and the old vintage of which he boasted proving his master, he had perchance, in this condition, his wits being gone, sought out the Princess.

Waiting not to gain a better understanding, I pushed aside the weeping woman, and half clad as I was, made straight for the Princess's chamber. Close behind came the Abbot clutching tightly the staff and frowning darkly. Yet did I wrong him deeply that I held against him such dark suspicion, thinking that so holy a churchman should be guilty of transgression.

Coming then in great haste to the Princess's rooms I saw that which for the instant held me powerless upon the threshold.

The door was partly open, and the red glow from the night lamp revealed within, a picture which ever after was in my memory.

Against the dark canopy of the bed from which she had arisen, stood the Princess Alice, her eyes flashing, and one white-hand clasping the ruffle at her throat. Aroused so rudely from her slumber with scarce breathing time to comprehend the danger which threatened her, there was a dignity in her face betokening the noble blood within her, the anger of insulted royalty outweighing the terror of the woman.

Yet 'twas not the Princess who held me spellbound, but that which stood against her; an evil figure, cloaked and booted, a plumed hat upon his head and gleaming

blade clutched in his hand. As I stood transfixed with anger and astonishment, the man moved nearer unto her, snarling a passionate appeal, half pleading, half a threat, and striking fiercely with the sword's point upon the marble tiling of the floor.

"God's mercy!" came the Abbot's voice from behind, "'Tis Sir Karl of Friedrichsstadt."

At the name, the stupor which had held me passed, and in an instant I stood between the Princess and the madman, with sword raised to cut him down, although 'twas in the presence of a woman.

And surely he would have died quickly had not the Princess cried out that indeed he was mad, and had in nowise injured her.

As he perceived me thus before him, the other drew his hand across his eyes, as though the flashing steel blinded him. I believe the man was truly without wits, for, as I hesitated whether to strike or spare, he thrust fiercely past me, thinking to reach the Princess. Then, in wrath, I plunged my sword into his shoulder wounding deeply, though 'twas in my heart to slay. Feeling himself sorely stricken, he drew back, claspings his hand over the hurt nor seemed to comprehend the situation.

Suddenly he laughed loudly, made a

thrust at me, and dropping his sword ran for the door wherein stood the Abbot surrounded by the score of churchmen. Ere any could guess his purpose he swept the father from his path and gaining the hall ran quickly down the passage to the chapel. Whether it was only in his mind to escape me, or that he had really lost his reason, I know not. I thought only that the man had sought to kill the Princess, striking at her with his sword, and that it were an ill matter if he escape so easily with but a thrust in the shoulder, the more so that he was of the House of Friedrichsstadt who was thus in my power.

I took no reckoning that it was an ancient abbey, a consecrated place, nor, forsooth, that the man was wounded and without a weapon. I found him in the chapel beneath the shadow of the cross, having struck down an aged monk, who overcome with fear, unwittingly stood in his way. As I came upon him, and even as he turned to meet me, I thrust him through the body, and thrust again, my brain on fire and the cries of those who saw it sounding in my ears.

It was the Abbot who came and took from my hand the bloody sword, led me to the altar and bade me kneel, that absolution might be more quickly granted. At

the same time approached a monk who whispered in the Abbot's ear, whereupon he turned and said the Princess desired that I go at once to her. But first I sought my chamber, being illy clad for the presence of the daughter of the House of Schleswig. Coming unto her apartments I found the Abbot with her, and he regarded me with a look I did not understand.

I had thought to find the King's sister pale, or perchance, in terror, having passed through so great a danger. But in this I was mistaken, for, instead, her cheeks were rosy and in her eyes a sweet shyness which set me to wondering, the more so that she greeted me kindly, holding out her hands and blushing prettily so that the Abbot hid a smile and turned him to the window.

"They tell me," said she, the glow upon her cheeks deepening, "that he who came so treacherously against me, is slain."

"'Tis so, Madame," I replied glancing at the Abbot, "for in my anger forgetting that—"

"Thy loyalty!" she interrupted. Then turning to the churchman also:

"Good Father, surely there are so-called sins, that be not wrong in heaven's sight?"

"God is indeed merciful," replied the Abbot, "and as thou sayst, there be certain sins forgiven with the making."

"Is it wrong, good father, that a woman love a man?"

"Faith," he answered crossing over to the table so that the light fell upon his face, "then were our mothers grievous sinners."

"But," said the Princess, looking down humbly, "is it wrong if she go yet further, so that the man more easily comprehend the matter?"

"As to that," replied the Abbot, "if the man be worthy and, forsooth, not married, it is no sin."

The Princess looked up quickly and the flush upon her cheek grew deeper, making her indeed very beautiful.

"Yet if she love him and he know it not?" she asked softly.

"'Twere fitting that with the modesty that becomes a woman, she make known the thing unto him," replied the churchman, "for, perchance, there may be much that stands between them, which, coming to the surface, will be swept away, whereby great happiness may follow."

"Then," said the Princess lifting her head so that her eyes met mine, "'twere no sin that loving, and the man being blind, the maid reveal her heart to him?"

But there was no reply from the Abbot for he had stolen from the room.

The hour was late and she doubtless weary, so I prepared to leave also, yet when I would have gone she came near, her cheeks burning and a shyness in her manner which I little comprehended. Suddenly I felt her hands upon my shoulder, and reaching up she kissed me softly on the brow, speaking my name so low that I scarce heard her.

Then indeed, I understood, yet so great was my surprise and so fierce the joy, that I spoke not, fearing it to be a dream of paradise, and I to be soon rudely awakened.

For many things a man needs no teaching, and, perchance, I grew exceeding bold. As to that I am no judge, though the Princess ever held it so, and forsooth, she was very wise in certain matters.

If it were a sin that a private gentleman loved a royal princess, and made bold to show it unto her, then indeed did I sin most grievously, yet receiving absolution from the holy father of Brenheim who comprehended well such matters, the thing troubled me little.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW THE FEAR OF DENMARK DISPERSED AN ARMY.

Perchance a monk had stolen from the abbey, that he might spread the story concerning the baseness of the House of Friedrichsstadt, or, mayhap, the sound of conflict had reached the ears of certain peasants who dwelt beyond the gate, and they, though not fully comprehending the matter, yet fearing that terrible things had taken place among the churchmen, hastened with all speed to Schleswig to make it known in the capital. Ere the sun had dried the dew upon the neighboring hillside, there came a clattering of steel upon the highway, and upon looking through my window I perceived the King, and close behind five hundred men-at-arms, riding with furious speed toward the Abbey. Then went the Abbot to meet them, seeing whom, the King cried out demanding how fared the Princess.

"By the cross!" cried he, a sudden fierceness in his eyes, "if any ill hath come to her, then will we seek out this bastard of

Friedrichsstadt, though he marshal the legions of hell itself to contend against us."

"Sire!" replied the Abbot calmly, "no harm hath come to her, and she even now lies sleeping in her chamber."

"It is well!" cried the King, "Yet strange tales have reached our ears; be it then a trick to draw us out of Schleswig?"

"Nay!" said the Abbot, "but 'tis an evil day for him of Frieheichsstadt in that one of his House hath sinned beyond forgiveness."

The King having dismounted he conducted him within the Abbey and related briefly that which had happened.

His Majesty smiled grimly. "There is one less rogue in Schleswig," said he, "methinks a stern example should be set to them who plot against our kingdom. Where lies the body of this accursed traitor?"

"Beside the altar," replied the Abbot soberly, "for the man being dead—"

"Aye!" said the King, "having gone unto his master. Yet the matter be not ended."

Then he summoned an officer, commanding that he straightway bear the dead unto the capital when, his burden being delivered to the public executioner, it should be hanged upon a gibbet in the market place, that all men might know there reigned a king in Schleswig. Nor could the

Abbot change the purpose of his Majesty, although he spoke earnestly upon the matter, contending that it had been a madman, who scarce comprehended the blackness of his errand.

"Zounds!" cried the King his face white with anger, "Were it a saint from heaven who had done this thing we should treat him likewise. But for yon Englishman, who struck so boldly, the Princess would be dead, and our father's house dishonored."

So he whom I had slain, was taken unto Schleswig and hanged on a gibbet in the market place and the thing spread throughout the kingdom.

There was much need, in truth, that the minds of the people should be awakened to the danger that beset their king, for, the followers of the Wolf were gathering in the north, and with them were certain of the Danish free companies who had crossed the border to aid the traitor. Yet, in summoning them to Schleswig, the Duke had o'erreached himself, for, the matter being noised abroad, many nobles who had wavered in their allegiance to the throne, made haste to join that side, choosing rather to serve the House of Schleswig, than to trust their fortunes to the Danes; it being well known, that having overcome the King, the free companies would turn

upon their leader, and thus Denmark might seize the throne of Schleswig.

Having remained at Brenheim for half a day, his Majesty returned unto the capital, taking with him the Princess and her women for, the war being well afoot, 'twould be an easy matter for the Duke's followers to lay siege to the abbey, and carry off the Princess a captive to the castle.

My guardianship being ended, and coming once more to the city, I set out for the inn of Master Schwerin, that I might find Sir Henry, and, perchance, Captain Von Francius. I perceived, indeed, that the hanging of Sir Karl's body in the market place had brought much benefit to the King, for, on every side excited groups of citizens conversed upon the matter, and the trend of their conversation was against the House of Friedrichsstadt. Nor had his Majesty neglected the opportunity thus afforded him, for he despatched in haste couriers to every quarter of the kingdom, who bore report of that which had happened at Brenheim. It was, indeed, one thing that the followers of the Wolf should take arms against the King, he being a claimant to the throne, quite another that a holy abbey should have been entered so ruthlessly, and the life of the royal Princess endan-

gered. Mayhap, the King, knowing the temper of his people, had excelled in wisdom even the worthy Abbot, in that he had caused to be publicly exhibited the body of the Duke's brother, pierced by half a dozen sword thrusts and insulted by the jeers of an excited populace.

Passing along the street which led unto the inn I came suddenly upon one of these groups of citizens; some ten of whom had gathered around an orator, who, having mounted a doorstep, was laying before his comrades the baseness of those who contended against the King.

"S'death!" cried he, "can there then be two minds about this matter? There be but one king in Schleswig, and behind him stand mes enfants d'enfer, therefore—"

Then catching sight of me he descended hastily from his elevation:

"Faith!" cried he, "here be one, indeed, who hath a better argument; 'tis Sir Martant who slew yon carrion!"

"Come!" said I, for the crowd pressed around me, "hast thou then turned advocate, having cast aside the sword?"

"Zounds!" he whispered, "yon fools be ripe for argument; the other will come presently. Thou goest—"

"To find Sir Henry," replied I, "and thou also."

"Then," said he, "let us go quickly, that we may hear concerning thine adventure in the abbey."

So saying he drew his cloak about him, bowed to the citizens, and walked with me unto the inn.

Having found my uncle and related to him that which had befallen me, I learned something of what had transpired while I remained in idleness beneath the roof of Blenheim.

The Wolf had declared war against the King, whose army was even then about to leave the capital, that the sword might decide the ending of the matter. There had also come about that which his Majesty's advisors had foretold. The Duke, having begun the affray, there were many who straightway joined their forces with the King, so that the royal army numbered thirty thousand men. It was the purpose of his Majesty to march without delay into the north, where were encamped the Duke's followers, and with them, those free companies sent by the King of Denmark. Yet in that was born the Wolf's misfortunes, for, his army being made up of peasants, fishermen and common folk, it trusted not the Danes.

'Twas not, in truth, the army of the King that gained a victory, but the will of God,

and the terror of the common people at the name of Denmark.

The free companies having come into the rebels' camp, a dispute arose between their leaders and certain of the Duke's lieutenants, whereupon each side drew sword and five men were slain. Then, the Danes boasted loudly, marching through the camp that all might note their strength and numbers, nor would they listen to any word of counsel. At that, fear seized the peasantry, and night coming on, five companies deserted and on the day following as many more. Thus it came about that on the third day, the army of the King having set forth from Schleswig, a courier from the north brought word that the army of the Duke had melted away so that none remained about him save some three thousand Danes and a thousand of his own followers.

The King then called a council of his officers, for it was little sooth that an army of thirty thousand men contend against so small a number. They having come together, decided that ten regiments proceed against the Danes so they be driven from the kingdom, but the King, with the remainnder of his army should return to Schleswig, and after showing himself to the people lead his followers against the castle

of Friedrichsstadt, which being taken, would leave the Duke destitute.

But the Wolf perceiving the purpose of his enemies, and fearing also the treachery of the free companies, gathered about him certain of his followers, and leaving camp in all haste, arrived at Friedrichsstadt ere the army of the King had returned unto the capital. There being few stronger fortresses in all Europe, methinks, the hope came to him that the matter would end with less disaster to himself than he had feared.

As to the Danes, being few in number and perceiving that the cause for which they had crossed the border was lost, they waited not the arrival of the royal troops, but after burning certain villages which lay in their way, and murdering three hundred of the peasantry, returned again to Denmark where none might follow them.

His enemies being thus dispersed the King returned to Schleswig where he remained one night amid the plaudits of the people. Having then given thanks for so bloodless a victory he commanded that early on the morrow the army should set forth for Friedrichsstadt.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW THE ARMY OF THE KING CAME INTO FRIEDRICHSSTADT.

It was early evening of the next day that the King's army crossed the last wooded hill which separated the domain of the Duke of Friedrichsstadt from the royal territory. Through the long march I had ridden by the King's side, surrounded by a glittering company of earls, counts and knights, for, as I said before, the flower of the nobility remained faithful to the throne. Behind stretched the army, horse and foot, winding like a serpent along the dusty highway, each company attired after its own fashion, and upon each shoulder the insignia of the House of Schleswig. But before all these, close behind the staff which surrounded the King, marched the Company; that bronzed, bearded crew in dented cap and breastplate, *les enfants d'enfer*, the name known throughout the length and breadth of Schleswig as the chosen soldiers of the King's body-guard. As we reached the summit of the hill which had hidden from us the towers of the

Wolf's stronghold, the King turned in his saddle, his eyes resting upon the bold leader of the little company. Then Von Francius, perceiving that His Majesty looked upon him, straightway drew himself together, wheeled about his horse, whipped out his sword, and spoke certain words unto his followers. Suddenly sixty blades flashed from their scabbards and sixty voices sent forth a roar which methinks even reached the ears of those who awaited us behind the battlements. If Red Tom, watching for our coming, heard the shout, his heart must have beaten the faster, for it was a familiar sound to him, so often had it rung across the Flemish marshes in the days when the Company numbered two hundred men, the fame of whose deeds filled the fair land of France and echoed across the wooded hills beyond the Rhine.

Hearing the shout and noting the glimmer of the waving blades, the troops directly back took up the cry, and so on those who followed, until far in the rear, where rumbled the rude besieging cannon, we heard the faint echoing, portending the victory of the King and the downfall of him who sought to snatch the crown.

"Faith!" whispered Sir Henry in my ear, "'tis a most royal greeting, and methinks these men of Schleswig could well

teach them who be more renowned in war."

When I would have replied there came a second mighty shout from the Company, for the King had doffed his hat, detaching therefrom the white plume he wore, and dispatched it by an aide to Captain Von Francius, bidding him fasten the same to his steel cap, in token of the gracious favor of his royal master. Then turning to a gray-haired general who rode at his side, he said:

"Methinks, Sir Baron, that could our noble father have been here this day, he would have died happier seeing the army to be of one accord in its loyalty to the throne."

"'Tis indeed a most welcome sight," replied the veteran, "and 'tis much pity that many of thy more humble subjects, being led astray by the promises of yonder traitor, did turn their hand against thy kingly honor. Methinks there remaineth but one thing."

"And that be?" quoth the King.

"To hang him, who hath brought bloodshed on the land, to the highest tree in his own forest," replied the general gruffly.

A shadow crossed the face of the King.

"'Tis for that," said he, "we have come

hither with so many of our loyal followers. What sayest thou, Sir Martant?"

"'Tis but just," I replied; "his sin be indeed too great for pardon."

"Zounds!" broke in Major Kratz, "'twill be indeed a merry sight that will greet the rising of the moon to-morrow. Methinks there be trees and to spare though I hear the castle holds some tenscore men."

"Nay!" cried the King, "they be witless fellows who do but follow their master's bidding. Wouldst thou that we turn our fair kingdom into a slaughter house?"

Sir Henry plucked my sleeve. "Faith," he whispered, "yon boy hath more heart than wisdom that he would spare one among so ill-favored a brood. Were it in England, I warrant me the ravens would have their fill."

But I, remembering the King's sister, answered nothing. Presently His Majesty gave the signal to move forward, and amid a cloud of dust stirred by so many feet the captains of the companies set their troops in motion.

The sun was touching the tops of the tallest trees when the army halted in an open glade some two miles from the castle, to conquer which we had come all the weary way from the gates of Schleswig. It was the purpose of the King to lie still until

the morrow, both that the army might rest, and that he might consult further with his officers regarding a plan whereby the castle be speedily taken. For, in truth, there lay great difficulty in the undertaking, the lair of the Wolf being a stronghold, and defended by some two hundred desperate men who expected no mercy from their outraged monarch did he once lay hands upon them.

Yet there was one thing which neither the Duke of Friedrichsstadt, secure behind his great pile of masonry, nor indeed the King and those who served him, took reckoning of, and that was the presence of Red Tom within the castle.

'Twas concerning this, that, having attended to our comfort for the night, Captain Von Francius drew Sir Henry, Major Kratz and me aside, that he might open his mind upon the matter.

"I have in remembrance," said he, "a certain stronghold of ancient times, wherein was hauled a wooden horse, the defenders fearing naught because of the thickness of their walls and the valor of those who manned the battlements. Is the story in thy memory, my Lord of Merguille?"

"Faith," replied Sir Henry, "and if the same play me not false, there arose from it certain issue which, coming into the world

unloosed the gates from the inside, whereby some others, both horse and footmen, lying without, did enter under cover of the darkness and slew in their beds those who had defied them so hardily. But wherefore speakest thou of such adventure? Surely there be no wooden horse within the walls of Friedrichsstadt."

The Captain chuckled softly. "Yet better than a horse," said he, "if thou canst but catch my meaning."

"What then?" asked Major Kratz; "'tis an ill time for riddles."

"Hast thou then forgotten a certain crafty soldier, Red—"

"Faith!" cried Sir Henry, slapping me upon the back, "'tis Red Thomas who playeth the horse on this occasion."

"Aye, thou art right!" chuckled Von Francius; "'tis this same rogue who for two months hath warmed his shins at the Wolf's fireside. Let there be secret passage or hidden gateway, be it ever so small, I warrant that thy countryman hath taken notice thereof, and when the time is ripe there will arise some bold adventure."

"Then the King—" began Major Kratz.

"Nay," said the Captain quickly, "the army must not know concerning that which toucheth us so closely. First let us speak with my comrade, that we know something

more regarding this matter. Then if the report be favorable with—”

“But thy comrade is within the castle,” broke in Major Kratz, and “we are here. How, then, shall we reach thy wooden horse?”

“Methinks,” quoth Von Francius, “that though, in truth, we can not go unto the horse, the horse may come to us. What thinkest thou Friend Martant?”

Knowing well Red Tom and that he but awaited our coming to strike a last blow for the King, I would have marveled little if at that moment the rough trooper had stepped into the circle of the firelight, holding the great key of the castle gate in his hand.

Just then there was a stir among the soldiers who lay about us, and an aide from the King appeared who bore a message to the effect that His Majesty awaited Captain Von Francius in his tent, and thither the burly veteran went, leaving us to wonder what his errand might be.

“’Tis some desperate venture,” quoth Sir Henry; “some sally or scout, alone or with his Company. Perchance there be something for us also in the matter.”

“Then,” said Major Kratz, “I accompany him, though I go but as a common soldier. My fingers have long ached to

strike a blow at the whelps of yonder Wolf."

While we were yet debating the matter and wondering wherefore Von Francius had so quickly gone unto the King, he strode again among us, his chest thrown out and his chin high in the air.

"Zounds!" cried he, "methinks, good friends, that we shall soon part company."

"And wherefore?" asked I; "goest thou then so quickly back to Schleswig?"

"God's death!" roared the Captain, "'tis thus thou offer insult to thy comrade! Schleswig, forsooth; 'tis the King's command that I go unto the castle."

"'Tis then a sally?" broke in Sir Henry; "yet must thou have wings to scale the walls."

"'Tis scarce so great a matter," replied the Captain proudly. "Yet there be much honor to my children." And with that he made known unto us the order of the King.

It was the latter's purpose to detach a certain number of soldiers from the main army, who, under cover of the darkness should steal to the rear of the castle where concealed by the forest, they could lie in wait for the advance of the main body on the morrow. Perchance the Duke being engaged with those who began the attack in front, would leave uncovered some loop-

hole whereby an entrance into the stronghold might be effected, and for this errand it had pleased His Majesty to choose les enfants d'enfer.

"Yet have I not forgotten thee," quoth Von Francius, "for in truth I did request of His Majesty that thou accompany me, to which he agreed most readily. Therefore, mon comrades, get thee ready quickly, for even now my children are buckling on their harness that no time be lost in so goodly an undertaking."

Thus it was that together with the others, and some fivescore soldiers, there being a company of ax-men added to those who followed Von Francius, I hurriedly departed from the King's encampment, leaving behind me a thousand glimmering camp fires, as by the Captain's side I plunged afoot into the darkness of the forest to follow a devious path known to one of those who formed the company, which Von Francius had been told would lead us to a deep ravine some forty rods beyond the castle walls, and where an army might lie concealed in sight of the grey-stone battlements, unseen by those who watched with eagle eyes from the highest towers.

Concerning that which followed closely, there is little to relate. 'Ere the first dawn of day had reflected from the sullen keep,

a hundred silent men lay quartered among the rocks within bowshot of the sentinels on the walls, the glint of whose steel we could perceive shining among the tree-tops, that fringed the cliff whereon stood the Wolf's stronghold.

All that day we lay under cover, listening to the sound of conflict raging before the castle. It being not time for action, we moved not except when I, accompanied by the Captain, and leaving Sir Henry and the Major in impatient idleness, crept to the top of the ravine where a goodly view offered itself.

The army of the King was drawn up in battle array, sheltered in part by the forest, so that it suffered scant harm from the defenders. Hidden by the trunk of a great tree from them upon the walls, we saw the royal banner of Schleswig, waving in its purple beauty at the fringe of wood which marked the border of the forest beyond the great open glade before the castle. Beneath its folds had gathered the nobility of the kingdom, surrounding with a dazzling pageant of bright uniforms, glittering orders, and waving plumes, the white horse which bore His Majesty—as youthful a monarch as ever led so sturdy a force of followers to battle.

To the left and right glimmered the steel

breastplates and shining caps of two thousand musketeers, the crack of their rude firearms resounding in spiteful volleys above the deeper boom of the besieging cannon. 'Twas in truth a hopeless task to batter down so strong a citadel and as we watched, a frown darkened the face of my companion.

"Zounds!" he muttered, turning his eyes to where the white smoke from the cannon rose in clouds above the fringe of forest, "There be not iron enough in Schleswig to stir the Wolf from his lair! 'Tis a sudden onslaught, or perchance a siege stern and relentless, that can gain the victory for the King. Those iron marbles were small play in so tough a matter."

Methinks much wisdom lay in his speech for in truth so solid was the masonry and so thick the walls that I doubt me if in all Europe were engines of sufficient strength to overcome them quickly.

Yet the roar of battle sounded until nightfall, when, having gained nothing save the killing of half a score of those who held the castle, the King gave orders that the conflict cease and presently we noted countless sparks amid the forest, as the soldiers exchanged their arms for the frying pan or toasting iron.

Thus night having fallen and all being

still before the castle we returned unto the Company. But I heeded little that which occurred about me, my thoughts being on Red Tom and the story of the wooden horse of Troy. Methinks Captain Von Francius's mind ran in the same channel, for I noted that frequently he turned his attention toward the castle and watched intently the edge of the ravine beyond which rose the frowning walls of the Wolf's stronghold.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW A WOODEN HORSE CAME OUT OF FRIEDRICHSSTADT.

There was little danger of surprise and scant need for precaution against the followers of the Dukè; still Captain Von Francius, as befitted a wise commander, neglected not to station certain outposts along the edge of the ravine, which lay nearest to the walls of the castle, in order that we might the better note the movements of those who were within. From time to time reports came to us that those who watched upon the battlements were scarce awake, but for that matter they could have slept most soundly, the bridge being raised and the port-cullis locked in place.

Being weary through lack of sleep, I had rolled my blanket about me and lay in a half doze beneath the shelter of a rock, when, somewhat about the hour of midnight, there came the hurried tramping of feet upon the leaves, and starting up, I saw that four of the watch of the company of ax-men had drawn near us, and

between them marched a man clad in the uniform of the Wolf of Friedrichsstadt.

Here then, was perchance something that touched our undertaking. Either a spy sent out from the castle, who had stumbled upon our whereabouts, or a messenger from a more distant portion of the kingdom, who, knowing not that the army of the King held the neighborhood, had ventured without thought of danger into the trap made ready for him. I noticed also that the prisoner walked with chin upon his breast, so that his face was hidden, nor heeded with any fear or trepidation the sword's point that one of his captors held against his ribs, so that seeking to escape by a sudden movement to the right or left, the steel would end his plans most rudely.

When Captain Von Francius perceived what had been brought unto him, noting with stern contempt the rebel's manner, he frowned most savagely, thinking perchance, to terrify the other.

"Ho!" quoth he, "what have we here? A fine bird for picking, I warrant me. Donnerwetter! Thou thought, forsooth, to find us sleeping, we who serve the King of Schleswig. Yet shalt thou die presently."

"And in the sight of them who serve thy master," broke in Major Kratz, who awakened at the coming of the watch, had

risen on his elbow. "Twill, perchance, serve as an example for others like thee."

"Sayest thou nothing, fellow!" roared the Captain; "hast thou no tongue to answer us?"

"S'blood!" muttered the prisoner, raising his eyes a little, "I be indeed fallen among bad company. Hang me quickly, therefore, that thy honor loseth nothing."

"Sire," quoth an ax-man, "we did find this fellow skulking beneath the walls, and were about to end his treason by a sword thrust, when we bethought, perchance thou wouldst hold some discourse with him. Yet, he proving a most surly knave, if thou desirest that—"

"Gott!" cried the Captain! "hadst thou slain him—Zounds, comrade, I came very near to losing thee. Had it been another that lay behind the castle, methinks there had quickly come a hanging."

"Faith!" growled Red Tom, looking around upon the Company, "thou wert well together in this matter, and in truth have I fallen among an evil gathering; when, therefore, wilt thou have the hanging?"

"To-morrow," quoth Von Francius, slapping his comrade upon the shoulder, "for I warrant me the castle be then the King's."

At which Red Tom smiled broadly, and having received our greetings made haste

to reach the meaning of the business which had brought him so suddenly among us.

It was, forsooth, that having been for many weeks an inmate of the castle, he had discovered a certain secret stairway, which led to a narrow vaulted passage, passing under the moat of the castle, and ended in a low opening hard by the ravine in which we had taken up our quarters. He had, moreover, unobserved, explored this passage, and having secured the key of the inner door upon his person, awaited with impatience the coming of the King to Friedrichsstadt. The army, therefore, being encamped about the walls, he had made his way with all haste along the exit, and coming to the open air beyond had fallen suddenly into the hands of the watch sent out by the leader of the Company.

"But," said he, "there be much need of haste, for if my absence is discovered and it be known to the Duke that I be not in the castle, he will straightway suspect something, and 'twere an easy matter for three men to hold against an army the narrow stair which leadeth from the passage to the castle."

"Faith," said Sir Henry, turning to the Captain, "here be indeed the wooden horse of which thou spake."

Red Tom looked upon us in perplexity. "Thou hast me there," said he, "there being nothing resembling a wooden horse within the castle, yet if thou wouldst ride, methinks there be something better in the stables."

I joined the laugh that greeted this sally, though there was within me little spirit of merriment, for indeed the ending of the undertaking appeared very doubtful.

The Captain, having heard Red Tom, sprang up quickly. "Come," cried he, "'tis but poor generalship that we idle here when the wheat be ripe for the sickle. But show to us, mon comrade, this way unto the Wolf, and, by the bones of Peter, if we give not a most welcome present to the King 'ere another moonrise, may my children scourge me as a boasting braggart."

"That," replied Red Tom, "will I do most gladly; yet methinks there needs extreme caution, for the Wolf is ever ready, and his scent be keen, so that driven to a corner he will fight with tooth and claws."

"And thou wilt lead me, Friend Thomas, unto the arch-traitor!" cried Major Kratz, "that I may, in sooth, avenge the fall of certain comrades and the better serve my King. Let me but meet him face to face, and—"

"S'blood!" replied Red Tom, "he will

be ready enough once thou art within the castle. Yet he be sore spent with watching, for, in truth, there be few beside himself and a handful of old followers, who have much zeal in this desperate business."

Now in my heart I resolved that 'twould be I who should seek out this lord of Friedrichsstadt, for the peril of the Princess was fresh in my memory, and for him who had waged war against her I felt a bitter hatred.

Having thus come to a common mind, that the opportunity offered us should be followed closely, Captain Von Francius spoke to the Company, laying the matter before them, and holding out the honor that would follow the sudden taking of the castle, while the army of the King lay encamped beneath it.

"There be some two hundred men within the walls," said he, "half of whom, as mon comrade telleth me, will bring but faint heart to the conflict; beside, their eyes being heavy with sleep, and the onslaught sudden, we gain therefrom exceeding advantage. Moreover, I promise in the King's name, much reward among us if yon castle be taken, but soldiers of Schleswig need forsooth no incentive, though dangers and even death surround them."

Had the undertaking been less secret, I

warrant me there had come a rude assent from the company; but instead, each man set to buckling on his harness, and there were many grim smiles upon the bronzed and bearded faces, for there was scarce one of *les enfants d'enfer* whose memory did not lead him back to the taking and sacking of certain lordly castles during the old wars.

Having made ready, we followed Red Tom in silence up the steep slope of the ravine, until he stopped beside a clump of bushes concealing the entrance to the narrow passage which led into the castle. Along this way there was scarce room for two to walk abreast and the Company being men of some stature were obliged to bend low their heads that their steel caps might not ring against the stone roof. Coming to the further end where the stairway led up some thirty feet to the main floor of the building, there was more room so that Von Francius and I strode by Red Tom's side. Behind followed Sir Henry with Major Kratz; then the hundred desperate troopers, each with his ready weapon in his hand.

Presently Red Tom pulled from his pocket an iron key and applied it to the oaken door which blocked our way. It swung quickly open and we pressed for-

ward, across another passage, broader than the first. A second door being opened we found ourselves in the great guest room of the castle, having entered, as it were, through a panel in the wall.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW A CERTAIN WOLF WAS SLAIN IN HIS LAIR.

"Hark ye, mon comrade," whispered Red Tom, laying his hand upon the Captain's arm, "there is one matter of great moment in this undertaking. 'Tis the opening of the gate that faces upon the forest, and about which lies the army of the King."

"Ach!" replied Von Francius, "we are of much the same mind concerning this thing. Yet I warrant me the gate will be opened presently."

"As to that," said Red Tom, "I have gone somewhat into the matter already. There is indeed one on watch, who, loving not the Duke, and forsooth perceiving that he and all who follow him are like to be hung presently, hath agreed, for the sparing of his life, to lend us what aid he may."

"And who may this fellow be?" broke in Major Kratz.

"A certain little Frenchman," replied Red Tom, "who even now commands those who guard the gate and drawbridge. There-

fore, I pray thee, lend to me five stout men when standing well together, we may overcome the eight who guard the entrance, so that the bridge being let down the King may take possession of his own."

To this Captain Von Francius assented gladly, and selected six stout soldiers of the Company, that Red Tom might carry out his purpose with all success. To these Sir Henry joined himself, being eager for adventure, so there went from us eight as desperate men as ever put hand to sword-hilt.

Having thus arranged the matter to his satisfaction, Red Tom took them down the great room and through the passage which led into the courtyard where, by the main entrance of the castle stood the Frenchman and his seven companions. After their departure the Captain ordered each man to look to his weapons, that nothing be wanting to secure the victory.

All being ready we waited with beating hearts for some signal which should make known to us that Red Tom had reached the courtyard. It came suddenly, a hoarse cry which echoed through the castle, a score of pistol shots with the clash of steel and the cries of them who were stricken. Then arose a shout from the Company, which, I

warrant, brought fear to many a sturdy heart suspecting little so dread a danger.

But there was scant time to note the effect of the surprise. At the sound of the firing below, 'ere the echo of the shout had rebounded from the great rafters of the hall, there burst from every door and passage half-clad men, their wits dulled with sleep from which they had so rudely been awakened. Those in advance who saw the dark line of men and the glimmer of our steel, paused with such suddenness that the ones who pressed behind were thrown back, nor comprehended the meaning of so great a tumult. Yet their wits returning, there began so fierce a conflict that the ring of steel and the noise of many pistol shots spread throughout the castle.

Then indeed was the Captain's generalship made clear to us, for, the hall being situated in the centre of the fortress, and the passage to the courtyard below covered by our men, none of those who sought to defend the place could reach the gate except through a wall of bristling steel. Moreover, the greater noise arising from the guest-hall, 'twas there the Duke's followers rushed most hastily, forgetting in their surprise that the key to victory lay about the gate, and that there were certain small passageways leading thither,

which ran not from the main chamber. Thus it was, while the Company held the battle ground, those who had followed Red Tom, were free to attack the defenders of the gate.

So quickly did this happen, that one could scarce have counted twenty 'ere six score of the Duke's men were pouring down upon us, and before them all came the Wolf, clad only in breeches, shirt and boots, a great sword in his right hand and his face darkened to the color of his sombre beard.

Even in the tumult that followed, when there was little time for aught but sturdy blows, there sprang up within me admiration for the man. He was too good a soldier not to perceive that we held the master hand, and although his half-clad followers might fight ever so desperately, they were but illy-matched against those whom he knew to be the flower of the royal army. Neither did he know how many men were in the castle, nor how they came there, or what number of his troops remained. I noted, also, that his presence roused his lagging followers, so that they rushed against us, steel to steel, cutting and thrusting in a desperate frenzy, only to be mowed down as wheat before the sickle.

Never, methinks, have I seen a more

goodly combat. The flash of swords, the gleam of battle-axes, the flames bursting from the muzzles of the pistols, as breast to breast those men of Schleswig contended one against the other. On one side they fought for love of fighting; the other, choosing as it were, 'twixt the King's executioner and the death strokes of *les enfants d'enfer*.

As we fought, the floor beneath us slippery with blood and piled high with the bodies of the slain, there came from below a great shout of victory, as Red Tom and his followers beat down them who held the gate. Then suddenly, above the tumult, came a second shout, swelling and echoing amid the forest, as the King's men, excited by the fight within the walls, pressed about the moat and before the closed port-cullis.

Methinks the Wolf of Friedrichsstadt understood then the full extent of what had befallen him, that the balance of victory lay trembling at the gate, and that the numbers of the assailants were below his own. He had cleared an open space about himself with his sword, so fierce had been his onslaught; could he but beat down the wall of steel and with a score of trusty followers at his back gain the gate, there would, perchance, come a turn in the tide of battle. Putting aside an ax leveled at

his head, he thrust the one who wielded it through the body, and 'ere any could guess his purpose, had turned quickly about and calling to his men to follow, made straight for the entrance of the hall, guarded now by scarce half a dozen of his enemies. Two of these he swept away by a mighty swing of his blade; a third, who would have checked him, slipped on the blood-stained floor, and a fourth and fifth gave way also. But one man remained between the Wolf and the open way beyond—Major Kratz.

I saw the veteran's eyes light up as he sprang on guard. One lucky stroke and the enemy to his King, the last of the bastard House of Friedrichsstadt, would trouble the world no more. Yet none reckoned on the prowess of a wolf at bay. I had thought to see a gallant fight, for in all the King's army there were scarce a dozen blades that could contend against the Major's swordsmanship. At my side Captain Von Francius, his dress awry and bloody, paused for an instant to witness so famous a contest; the black Duke of Friedrichsstadt against the King's most trusted officer. The end came so suddenly that, 'ere we could comprehend the will of Fate, it was all over. For the space of a breath the Wolf glared down upon his enemy, and methought I saw his white teeth glisten as he

smiled. Then the Major struck a sturdy blow, straight and true, and the archtraitor bent his body catching the other's blade upon his own. The Major staggered, his feet tripped against the body of a fallen comrade, and before any could avert the blow, the Duke's sword swept in a flash of steel above his head, meeting squarely upon its edge the unprotected crown of the King's officer, cleaving the skull from brow to teeth as though it were an egg shell. I heard the oath that came from Von Francius' lips and for a second my eyes grew dim. Then, forgetting all else but that the Wolf was clattering down the stairs, I ran also, shouting to him to turn and fight me—I who had slain his brother.

I scarce remember that which followed. I only know that fast as the Duke ran I gained upon him. We reached the courtyard side by side, and I heard the other utter a great oath, for the rattle of the drawbridge sounded in our ears. At that he stopped, and by the light of the torches I saw his face turn ashen pale. Perchance he had forgotten me, for the point of his sword rattled against the pavement, and I, loth to strike him from behind, withheld my blade, calling to him to play the man and meet me fairly.

He turned his head slowly, his lips parting in a sneering smile.

"In time," said he; "yet first there be bigger game that calls from yonder corner."

Following his glance I saw that his eyes rested on Red Tom, who, all unmindful of the Wolf's presence, stood beneath the flare of the torches directing them who worked upon the gate.

Never before, or since, have I seen such a look of hate as flashed into the face of him of Friedrichsstadt. I saw the hand that clutched his sword hilt tighten, and the shadow upon his brow grow blacker. Suddenly he leaped forward, straight upon Red Tom, that he might strike dead the traitor who had betrayed him to the King. But quick though his action, I was before him. As the steel descended it met my own with a crash that well nigh tore the weapon from my hand, and sent a shower of glowing sparks dancing heavenward. Then the Duke's wrath broke all bounds, and turning fiercely, he drove at me as though to end the matter with one fearful thrust.

I know not how long the conflict lasted. It seemed hours between those thrusts and passes, so quick, so fierce, that with all my swordsmanship I was twice wounded in the arm and the plume shorn clean from

my soldier's bonnet. Afterward I learned that they who witnessed the duel scarce drew their breath, so intense and absorbing was the interest of the contest; that the ring of steel filled the castle yard, and the flash of our blades outshone the very light of the torches. The voice of Red Tom sounded in my ear:

"The stroke, lad; the stroke! Past the carte and upward; beware the point!"

'Twas that which gained the victory. A famous thrust, taught me by my comrade during the idle days in England, but at that moment I had forgotten it.

As though to retreat before the Duke's onslaught I sprang back; then with all my power thrust boldly at his shoulder, turning the direction of the point 'ere it met his blade. It slipped harmlessly from my own; I felt the steel meet the flesh, the force of the thrust burying my sword in his body.

With a clang his weapon fell to the pavement, and the blackness of his countenance changed to an ashen greyness. It was scarce a second ere I heard a great shout, the joyous cry of Red Tom, and the hilt slipped from my fingers as the Wolf, tottering, fell dead upon the blood-stained flagging.

'Twas Red Tom who first reached my side, and faint and breathless I leaned

against his sturdy shoulder, scarce witting that my enemy was dead, and that the courtyard swarmed with the soldiers of the King. Yet close upon Red Tom came Sir Henry, his clothes bloodstained and a great cut upon his forehead.

"Faith!" cried he, his voice trembling, rough soldier that he was, "'twas a bold stroke, lad, and nobly given; yet, by Our Mother, I feared to lose thee."

"S'blood!" roared Red Tom, pressing me in his arms before them all, "I feared not for him; for who be there in Schleswig, barring, perchance, a certain comrade, whose blade be truer?"

Just then, before nobles and soldiers, the King strode forth from among those who pressed about the gate, and holding out both hands, thanked me, with many flattering words, for thus having slain his enemy.

"And," said he, turning to those who stood about us, "'twill be our pleasure to do great honor to this gallant gentleman, and to those comrades who have this day so nobly served their King."

Thereupon, taking from his breast the royal order that he wore, he bestowed it upon Red Tom, as a token that thereafter all should do him honor. Yet, as he spoke, *there* arose a shout within the castle, and

at the bottom of the stairway, the one down which I had come, appeared the Captain, sword in hand. With a glance he saw the King, the royal soldiers and the body of the Wolf. For an instant he stood like some hero of bygone years fresh from the heat of conflict—with bared breast and bloody uniform, the white plume which the King had given him drooping under its crimson baptism.

Then indeed a mighty cry went up, a soldiers' welcome to the father of les enfants d'enfer. And the King commanded that they be brought before him, sending certain of his soldiers to guard the prisoners.

Presently there was a rattling of steel upon the stairs and a little company stepped forth into the courtyard, some thirty of the Captain's children, and a dozen blood-stained ax-men; for, of the hundred who went forth to seize the castle-threescore were dead or sorely wounded. Of the Duke's followers, twice that number lay piled up within the hall.

The King, learning that Major Kratz lay among the slain, went unto the body and with his own hand, pinned upon its breast, the highest order known in Schleswig. When he returned to the capital, he caused to be erected to his memory, a shaft of

marble, and upon its face was carved a giant oak, to show through all time in what manner the man had served his friend and master.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW THE KING RETURNED TO SCHLESWIG.

For three days the army of the King lay encamped about the walls of Friedrichsstadt, and on the second evening his Majesty gave a great banquet in the guest chamber of the fortress. The slain and the stains of battle had indeed been cleared away, yet, upon the walls, the dark oak panels, and the quaint carvings of the rafters, remained the scars of conflict, and they may be seen even to this day. In Schleswig had come about a most unwonted happening; the noblest dukedom of the kingdom was, in truth, without a master, save the King, who held it as a conqueror. Many rumors there were which spread among the people; one, that 'twas the purpose of the King to raze the fortress to the ground, so naught might remain as a reminder of the rebel house of Friedrichsstadt. Others held that when it should please the Princess to give away her heart the castle with its forests and rich pasture lands would become her dower, and to the fortunate winner would fall the title. Yet

of that the King said nothing, nor do I think any in the kingdom, except it may have been the good Abbot of Brenheim, would have touched upon the subject.

Among the royal officers were many, who, because the Wolf had turned against his King, affording opportunity for the Danes to cross the border, considered that his body should be hung from the highest turret of the castle, yet the King would not permit it. He held that although a traitor the man had been a noble of the kingdom, a cousin to the royal house of Schleswig, and, being dead, his sins should be forgiven. I have always been of the mind that the words of the worthy Abbot had much weight in this matter, for there were none from whom his Majesty took such close counsel. The wise churchman had indeed journeyed with all haste to the castle on the day following the victory of the King, fearing, methinks, that having overcome his enemy his Majesty would heed more the anger of his followers than the more prudent counsels of his heart. As that may be, the body of the Duke was buried as befitted so high a nobleman, nor received that dishonor which his baseness merited. Those of his followers who remained after the taking of the fortress, the King pleased should go unharmed; two days were given them to

leave the kingdom, their goods being confiscated, as an example for those who in the future might desire to turn against the state.

It was on the third day, that the King returned to Schleswig, leaving at the castle les enfants d'enfer and a company of fifty musketeers under the command of Von Francius, whom he had made a colonel with the order that thereafter he should be leader of such guards as it pleased his Majesty to keep near his person.

It was nightfall ere the army reached the capital. While still far off we perceived that many lights shone in the city. The streets were lined with people holding aloft great torches, and crowding close upon each other that they might draw nearer to the King. He rode in advance with head uncovered and a smile upon his face, for the welcome of his subjects touched him deeply. Following him were certain of his officers arrayed in all their gorgeous uniforms, and after them Sir Henry, and Hal Martant, for the King had thus commanded. At my side rode also the Abbot of Brenheim mounted upon a bay mare, and I would have been scarce surprised if beneath the holy robe of priesthood, there had shone the gleam of steel. In truth nature fashioning him, had thought to make the soldier.

As I rode between the shouting lines one fellow recognizing in me the slayer of the Wolf of Friedrichsstadt sent up a cry, waving his torch, and pointing at me. Then went up a roar that echoed and re-echoed through the crowd, and glancing at the Abbot I saw him smile, and Sir Henry chuckled softly at the honor done his kinsman, or, perchance, at the redness of my face.

"S'blood!" muttered a voice behind me, "The lad be like a woman with so much blushing; would that Sir Charles——"

Yet came his turn, for, catching sight of him certain ones set up another shout, calling aloud his name, and others joined who knew him not, yet swelled the tumult with their voices—

"Faith!" said the Abbot, "These men of Schleswig do welcome thee most royally; methinks the Princess——"

Then noting my confusion, he laughed softly.

Presently we drew near the palace and there awaiting us was the sister of the King, surrounded by her women, and a throng of smiling courtiers.

Having dismounted, his Majesty took my hand and led me to the Princess, bidding that she speak her thanks to him who had *slain* her enemy and his.

Thereupon she blushed so prettily, that the King perceiving it raised his eyebrows, being greatly puzzled that his sister should thus receive me, little suspecting what lay in her mind.

"Faith!" said he turning to the Abbot, "Were it not the Princess, methinks yon redness had certain gentle meaning, yet being so I warrant 'tis but upon the surface."

The Abbot smiled, remembering a certain night within the abbey, and presently the King left us, first bidding me relate to his sister that which concerned the taking of the castle. Having withdrawn into the seclusion of an alcove, methinks she liked well that I spake unto her, although 'twas scarce of battles and the storming of fortresses, as his Majesty had commanded. The King coming again upon us smiled pleasantly, noting that the Princess was in gentle mood and looked upon me kindly. Nor was it strange that he wondered, for 'twas well known in Schleswig that she cared little for warlike tales, the more so that they pertained unto men. But with the King came certain of her women, and the hour being late she took leave of us, retiring to her chamber.

"Sir!" said the King, hath it ever come about that thou hast marveled at a woman?

"Sire!" replied I, "being a man, such thought hath often come to me."

"Faith!" said he, turning to Sir Henry, who, having finished a discussion with the Lord High Chamberlain regarding certain customs then in vogue through France, drew near to us, "Hast thou, my Lord of Merquille, discovered wherein lay a woman's reason?"

"Concerning that," replied my uncle, "Sir Francis Drake was wont to hold that a ship without a helmsman, and the mind of a woman lay very close together."

"Zounds!" cried the King, "thy countryman spake most wisely, yet are women quick to serve them who hold their heart, hast, perchance, taken some note regarding it?"

"I remember," replied Sir Henry, "a certain occasion when the crew of a ship in which I last visited the Americas, would have tortured a savage chieftain, his daughter, a woman of exceeding comeliness, did offer herself as ransom, begging she be taken in his stead."

"And what followed?"

"Faith!" replied Sir Henry, I were well pleased if the matter quite escape my memory, for 'twere of little credit to an Englishman. Yet it recurs to me that *certain* information regarding it coming to the

hearing of Sir Francis, the captain of this same crew lost his ears as a reminder of his venture."

"Indeed!" said the King, "such women are exceeding rare."

The hour having come when it was fitting to retire, we took leave of his Majesty, repairing to our lodging, when, casting aside our heavy trappings and ordering a flask of wine, we fell to discussing that which had befallen us at Friedrichsstadt.

"Would!" cried Sir Henry, "that thy father were in Schleswig this night, for indeed great honor has come upon thee."

"Yet," said I, "when thou goest back to England, thou wilt relate it unto him. Would that I might follow thee."

"What now?" he growled, "Art thou then so weary of thy fortune? Methinks there be that in Schleswig to keep thee forever."

"As to that," said I, "the King hath promised much honor in the future. Yet when thou art gone there remainest only Red Tom—"

"Faith!" And not a certain princess?"

"The Princess!" cried I, "Wherefore—"

Sir Henry laughed. "There be a certain man in Schleswig, a worthy Abbot, who didst question me with much earnestness concerning thine ancestry, and I, being

more knave than fool, gathered that there lay much reason in his conversation."

"But the King?"

"If the Princess loves thee, and 'twas that the churchman intimated, methinks a way be found to approach him and gain his approbation."

"Yet," cried I, "he hath much pride, and I—"

"Faith!" replied Sir Henry, "'twas of that I spake unto the worthy Abbot, who having listened, held that the Princess was wont to make her own choosing in certain matters. Yet, would I know from thee concerning this matter."

Being in sore perplexity, fearing lest the displeasure of the King be heavy against me when it was made known to him that I had won, where many men had failed, I related to my uncle that which had befallen at the Abbey of Brenheim.

"T'is in truth a gentle tale," quoth he, "the King can scarce refuse her."

"But," said I, "being not a nobleman and she a royal princess—"

Sir Henry smiled. "Thou hast slain a Duke and art of the House of Merguille."

Despite his words I was much troubled, and tossing restlessly upon my couch that night, was lost in fantastic dreams, seeming to mount a staircase of many steps which

crumbled successively behind me. No going back, the past was an abyss; no stopping, for the present perished. But beyond, a radiant vision beckoned, its face the one which ever, sleeping or waking, was in my heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW THERE CAME ABOUT A MISSION UNTO DENMARK.

Schleswig was not my country, and none there took reckoning of the House of Merguille, looking upon me as but a rude soldier of fortune, with sword for passport, and, who having sought and found adventure in their country, with due honor from its King, would soon depart for new fields and conquests. So it was small wonder that that the King, upon hearing certain things, should demand an interview with me and call the worthy Abbot of Brenheim to an accounting for the guardianship of his sister, the Princess Alice.

My mind was indeed ill at ease, for although Rupert the Third was much beholden to me in that I had rid the kingdom of his enemy, 'twere one thing to reward a soldier and quite another that he allow him to aspire to a union with the House of Schleswig. 'Twas of that his Majesty spake unto me on the second day following his return from Friedrichsstadt.

Being summoned to appear before him I

found him seated in his private cabinet, an inkpot at his elbow and a great parchment spread before him. With the King was the Abbot of Brenheim.

As I entered, his Majesty pushed from him the scroll and raising his eyes quickly, frowned darkly at me.

"Sir!" said he, "methinks thou art a fellow of exceeding boldness."

"Sire!" I replied, "I am a soldier."

The Abbot turned his face away as though he wished not the King should note his smile.

"Faith!" cried his Majesty, "There be none more valiant in all our kingdom, yet hast thine ambition outrun thy wisdom; having rendered us much service would thou seat thyself beside us?"

I answered nothing.

"It hath reached our ears," continued the King, "that in thy boldness thou didst speak to the Princess Alice upon a matter of great importance. This, in truth, hath she confessed to us."

"Sire !" said I, "If it be a sin to love a royal princess, then am I—"

"Zounds!" cried he, "thou dost use a woman's argument. 'Twas not in loving thou didst sin, but in—"

"Sire!" said the Abbot softly, "Perchance the Princess told thee—"

"If 'twere not so, then would this man have died."

The Abbot turned upon him. "Sire!" said he sternly, "'twas he who saved the Princess in the forest."

"In truth!" muttered his Majesty.

"And lew Sir Karl of Friedrichsstadt."

The King nodded sullenly.

"And killed thy cousin in his castle."

"'Twas even so," replied the King.

"Then, 'tis thou who sinnest, thinking to dishonor him."

The King flushed angrily. "Faith! Sir Abbot," cried he sharply, "thou dost forget the King."

Yet, 'twas I who replied, for I felt great anger that he had so addressed me.

Pulling my sword from its scabbard I cast it upon the table.

"Sire!" cried I, "I serve no man who speakest thus against me; neither need the Princess fear aught concerning me. I have, perchance, fulfilled my oath to thee, and served thy sister faithfully, prithee, therefore, do that quickly that best pleaseth thee, for I no longer serve the State of Schleswig."

Now, although the King was young, yet was he exceeding wise in certain matters, and justice was a bright jewel in his character. Moreover, he knew the Princess

loved me, and the words of the Abbot had touched his dignity.

"Indeed!" said he glancing at the sword, "thou hast, in truth, a ready temper. Perchance if there be some excuse—"

"Nay!" said I, "Except that I be a man."

He smiled faintly. "And she a woman. Methinks others have loved her also, yet did she set her heart against them."

"Of this," said I, "something hath reached my ears, therefore I marvel greatly."

"That she should love thee? Faith! were our royal father yet alive, methinks there would be but one ending to the matter."

"And now?" said I.

The King took up the sword.

"'Tis a goodly blade and hath slain a duke, and others of our enemies; 'twere in truth, a pity that it lose its master."

"And the King so brave a subject," quoth the Abbot.

Said the King: "The two go well together, therefore, Sir Martant, we return it unto thee."

"Sire!" said I, "'tis ever at thy service."

The King turned to the table and taking up the document, said:

"Good father, here is a matter we pray thee think upon;" and he handed him the paper.

The Abbot having cast his eyes over it looked hard upon the King.

"It is a matter of much import," said he, "and methinks I catch thy meaning. Thou wilt send unto the Danes an emissary?"

"It seems fitting," replied his Majesty, "the council has so advised us. Knowst thou a man in Schleswig who may be capable for so delicate a matter?"

"Methinks," replied the churchman, "that a soldier could best accomplish it, for, perchance there lies much danger in the undertaking; ready wit backed by a good sword, were better than long speeches and fair words."

"Thou speakest with much wisdom," cried the King, "and, there be one in Schleswig who will well serve our purpose."

"There is in truth such an one; Sir Harold Martant!"

"Sir Martant!" said the King, "being in deep displeasure we called thee hither, yet that be passed. A man does much for love, and perchance—," a frown gathering on his brow: "Perchance the Princess Alice loves thee."

"Sire!" cried I.

"She hath, in truth, spoken unto us with all a woman's argument. Therefore much is yet required of thee."

"My life—" cried I.

"Nay!" said he glancing at the Abbot, "thou art too brave a gentleman, aye, and too good a subject, to lose thee altogether. Yet, if death should come to thee, there is one in Schleswig who, please God, would remain ever loyal unto thee even as thou art loyal to the King."

"Amen!" I heard the Abbot mutter.

The King smiled.

"Faith!" said he, "'tis scarce so serious a matter; thou wilt return, having served the State, and yet—"

"'Tis then a mission?" ventured I.

"'Tis indeed our pleasure," replied his Majesty, "to give to thee a mission of much importance, for thou art in truth both brave and loyal. Certain differences have arisen betwixt our kingdom and the State of Denmark, which demand attention, therefore we desire to study well the matter lest we be taken unawares."

"Then," said I, "thy Majesty proposes—"

"That thou go among the Danes; mayhap we learn something of their purpose whereby we may better guard our kingdom."

When he thus made known his purpose there came unto me certain fears for the matter was not clear to me. Although there might be much honor in the undertaking, there was also exceeding danger, for the

King of Denmark cherished great bitterness against the House of Schleswig, seeking some excuse to bring about a war between the kingdoms, and the fire being lighted who could quench so fierce a conflagration? Yet, 'twas not the fear of danger which troubled me, but a dark suspicion that behind it all lay a hope in the King's mind, that, having fallen into the power of the Danes, I should return no more to trouble him. But, being successful, perchance the way would be clearer, therefore I thanked his Majesty, laying much stress upon the honor done me.

Perchance a look betrayed my suspicion to the Abbot, for I saw his brow darken and he turned away from me. The King held out the parchment.

"This," said he, "sets forth that Sir Harold Martant, a loyal subject, goes to Denmark as our representative. Yet 'twere better if none took reckoning of thine errand, it being secret."

I thought 'twere little use, going as a spy, to carry on my person credentials from the King of Schleswig. But I thanked him and he, having put my name upon the document, stamped it with the royal seal, and gave it unto me.

"Faith!" said he, laughing, "My cousin of Denmark will scarce look upon thee

kindly if it come to his ears that thou art Schleswig's emissary."

"As to that," said I, "I fear little, but I would make bold to ask permission of thy Majesty that I take with me a certain soldier."

"Thy comrade! So be it; his sword may, perchance, be of service unto thee."

Having, therefore, fixed upon the morrow for my departure, I took formal leave of him, and was overtaken in the hallway by the Abbot who had a word for me. He, forsooth, referred to my suspicion of the King, assuring me I did him wrong, he harboring no ill against me.

"Most worthy Abbot," I replied, "Mayhap I unjustly impute evil to thy Master, but God willing, I will return to Schleswig, having finished with the Danes, when, let us hope, this matter will be somewhat clearer."

He pressed my hand. "Fear not," said he, "if God spare thee, thou wilt return in honor; but concerning the Princess— she knows naught of the decision of the King, they having parted in anger when she spake to him of thee, and his words were very harsh, that a princess should reveal her love thus openly. Thou wilt go therefore unto her for her heart is very sad."

"And wilt thou watch over her?" I cried.

"Aye!" he whispered, "that will I until thou come again."

When, with heavy heart, I came unto my chamber I found there Sir Henry who awaited me. He returned my greeting with grave and troubled face.

"Lad," said he, "a ship hath come from England, to Schleswig."

"There be many indeed in the harbor," I replied, "therefore—"

"Yet the captain brought a letter unto me; 'twas from thy father."

"What?" cried I, my father—"

"He hath much need of me," replied my uncle, "a sickness hath come upon him."

I caught his hand. "Tell me," I cried, "knowest thou of this thing?"

"'Tis little, here is the letter."

Truly it was brief, speaking of a certain malady which had sent him to his bed, where he lay in such pain and loneliness that he besought Sir Henry to return to him.

"And I go also!" cried I.

My uncle shook his head. "Nay, lad; for we should lose thee, but I will tell unto thy father much concerning thee. Perchance 'twill mend him quickly, for methinks his malady be of the heart."

"And tell him," said I, "that he is ever

with me, that God willing, I shall return again to him."

"That will I, lad! Yet he may come to thee, in Schleswig."

He said further, that within two days a ship would set sail for England and he had taken passage thereon that he might the sooner reach my father's side. Then, laying his hand upon my shoulder:

"There is another matter, lad, concerning which I would speak unto Sir Charles. The King hath spoken to thee?"

So I told him, hinting also of my suspicion.

He smiled grimly.

"I warrant me," said he, "'twill be an honor, and if thou return safely, the King will welcome thee."

"If, indeed, I do return."

"As to that," replied Sir Henry, "there can be no reckoning, thy fate being in the hands of God. Yet thou hast come even unto this hour in safety, and Denmark is not worse than Schleswig, moreover, Red Tom will be with thee."

After that I left him and hastened to the palace, when the Princess straightway received me, having already heard from the good Abbot that which the King had commanded. She met me bravely, yet her eyes were filled with tears, and her heart

very sorrowful, knowing well the uncertainty and danger to which I went, and thinking, perchance, her words had sent me thither.

There remained indeed but little time for parting, for 'twas early on the morrow that I was to set forth for Denmark, and certain things yet remained undone.

As I held her in my arms she spake bravely unto me, lifting her eyes to mine that I might see the love therein.

"If thou die," cried she, "I shall know how to keep thy memory. If thou return, I shall welcome thee with true and faithful heart, as becomes thine own, and—"

"Sweatheart!" I replied, "Denmark is not heaven, therefore I will come again to thee."

She smiled through her tears. "Would that I could go with thee," she whispered, "for the days will be very long."

I pressed her to me and kissed her lips, then put her from me, and thus we parted that I might go forth to serve the King.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW A SIMPLE TALE ENDETH.

Time hath dealt lightly with me through the years that have passed (the number of which can be reckoned on the fingers of one's hands) since Red Tom went with me from Schleswig into Denmark on the King's mission; but they have brought many changes.

After the hour when I parted from my princess, trusting but in the will of God, I summoned Red Tom that I might lay before him the wishes of the King. He, forsooth, agreed most gladly to follow me, the more so, that Schleswig being at peace within its borders, the Wolf slain, he feared his joints grow rusty and his sword hand lose its cunning.

"Faith!" said he, "'twere in truth of much advantage to the King, that the matter be so quickly ended, yet, there be others, Fritz Von Francius, and a certain Englishman, who, being children of the sword, must perforce lie in idleness. Now it seems that great fortune hath befallen me, for rumor hath it, that these Danes are

very fierce in warlike matters, ever seeking them who delight in sword play."

"And perchance," said I, "they hang the vanquished from a gate post."

"Then," replied Red Tom, "it matters little whether it be in Schleswig, or in Denmark."

Whereupon he made haste to perpare for our departure on the morrow.

Concerning my errand, what befell us, the coming again to Schleswig, and the King's welcome; mayhap there be certain ones who, loving a brave tale, hath set it down, that the thing be not forgotten..... There be moments when the door is ajar which leads into the silent chamber of the mind where is stored the records of the past, and there come to me memories of those by-gone days. How I had dwelt upon the words spoken at parting, dreamed dreams and cherished fancies, until Red Tom checked rude spirits, and became silent also, fearing the air of Denmark had, in truth, taken away my reason.....

Were a stranger to walk through Schleswig, happening near to a certain inn close by the palace about the hour of noon, he might chance upon a man of lofty aspect, whistling as he walked, swinging against his calves a goodly sword, and seeming to study with much intentness the gables of

these houses. And if it was his pleasure to inquire concerning a personage of so redoubtable appearance, he would learn 'twas General Fritz Von Francius, a very warlike man, and the onetime leader of a famous company.

If this same stranger should grow weary of the city and ride beyond its walls, following a certain highway, he would find the road led to Friedrichsstadt, where lay the castle of the Duke, a man much honored throughout the kingdom. Perchance, some peasant made garrulous by a piece of silver, would relate to him certain strange things which had happened at the castle some years ago—when the sixth lord of Friedrichsstadt had rebelled against the King, whereupon the latter laid siege to the fortress and the Duke was slain. That the slayer of the traitor had distinguished himself in the service of the King, and was graced with many marks of the royal favor, but though there had been given to him power, rank, command and influence, all was nothing beside the hand of a royal princess which was bestowed upon him with the dukedom, and all pertaining thereunto.

Then, perchance, the stranger might desire to see so famous a castle, and approach the drawbridge, when would come forth a

grizzled man, wearing upon his thigh a mighty sword, who, perceiving one from foreign parts, would question him concerning the State of France, or Spain, whether they be at peace or war, and such like matters.

In truth was Red Tom ever sniffing conflict, declaring that the world was ruled by women, and an honest soldier must needs turn highwayman, else he lose his occupation.

There are, indeed, moments when I catch his spirit, take down my sword, at which he smiles gladly, clanking his blade upon the pavement and edging toward the courtyard. Then, forgetting I am a lord of Schleswig, I bid him draw, and perchance, for a half hour the clash of steel rings through the castle, till growing weary of the sport I cry enough, and Red Tom chuckles.

Once, the King with the Abbot of Brenheim, having ridden unto Friedrichsstadt, and being in high good humor, did lay a wager, that in all his kingdom there was no man who could best me when it came to sword play. Then, Red Tom drew his weapon, kneeled before the King and asked forgiveness that he, a simple soldier, should make so bold as to contend with the Duke of Friedrichsstadt.

"Faith!" cried his Majesty, "'twere a

serious matter and perchance thou be hung afterward, yet hast thou our forgiveness. Lay on therefore that we may witness so bold a contest."

"S'blood!" muttered Red Tom, casting off his jacket. "My joints be stiff with idleness, yet methinks the lad be venturesome."

Thereupon he fell to, thrusting and cutting, springing back and lunging forward with so strong a wrist and so fierce a purpose, that twice he pricked my shoulder and ended by disarming me.

Then was the King greatly pleased and laughed good naturedly though he had lost his wager.

"Faith!" said he, "we had forgotten 'twas thou who taught him; 'twere a goodly sight, most worthy Abbot?"

But the Abbot being a churchman answered nothing.

.....
Elizabeth is dead, yet have I not set foot in England. Perchance were my father living, but Sir Charles did not survive the malady which caused Sir Henry to leave me so abruptly.

Once each year comes my uncle unto Friedrichsstadt, a grim old man, fond of adventurous tales; a relic of the days of Drake and Frobisher, and boon companion of Von Francius and Red Tom. His visits

lengthen, and when the day comes on which he shall join my father, methinks 'twil find him within these walls.

"I thought," said he, "to end my days in England, yet times be changed, and, in truth, is the road to heaven the same whether it leads from Schleswig or from Britain."

There are certain moments when my heart grows heavy as I recall scenes for ever past. Then I seek a quiet spot o'er looking the wood of Friedrichsstadt. If it be evening, and the moon casting over all things her silvery light, I see in fancy my father's house, and beyond, the road to London with its border of thatched cottages and fringe of English hedge. My eyes grow dim, but the mists roll away as I turn to greet her who comes softly to my side, my royal princess.

As we stand in silence at the open window watching the beauty which covers the earth there comes to us the sound of singing 'Tis the voice of Red Tom humming a rude refrain, an English war song, well known throughout the Flemish marshes.

THE END.

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